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An interfaith group finds willing partners to restore a shared watershed

By Yonat Shimron, Religion News Service Environment
National Catholic Reporter

On a chilly fall day several weeks ago, volunteers from five Maryland congregations came together in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore to plant 90 trees.

The planting was unique for two reasons: It drew a team of Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians and Conservative Jews. And in the space of three hours, they managed to get all the saplings into the ground and hold an interfaith service, too.

"It was a very effective and powerful experience," said McKay Jenkins, a member of Baltimore's Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church and one of the volunteers at the planting. "This is not something a couple of do-gooders at one church can do."

That multiplier effect is the idea behind [Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake](#), a 5-year-old nonprofit organization that brought together the five congregations to plant Cherry Hill's trees. Elsewhere in the vast Chesapeake Bay watershed, which extends from western New York State into central Virginia, the group has gathered volunteers, often across the religious spectrum, to work on restoration projects, ripping up pavement, installing water gardens and, yes, planting trees.

Its work recently landed Interfaith Partners a \$1 million grant from the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#). The money is intended to educate an additional 100 congregations about stormwater management and help 36 of those worship communities install green infrastructure on their properties to lessen the flow of pollutants into the bay.

Interfaith Partners already works with Protestant and Catholic churches, Jewish synagogues and Buddhist temples, mostly in Maryland, but the group hopes to expand into Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, about 50 miles above the point where the Susquehanna River, freighted with runoff from farms and paved surfaces, spills into the Chesapeake Bay.

At a time when many congregations are divided between urban and rural, liberal and conservative, rich and poor, black and white, the nonprofit, based in Annapolis, Maryland, is finding it can bring people of faith together around a common core: a shared watershed.

"We want to ignore man-made boundaries and see the God-made boundaries that unite us, like a watershed," said Jodi Rose, executive director of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake. "We have a responsibility to take care of these shared resources."

The new grant will not actually award churches money for green projects. It will instead allow Interfaith Partners to reach more congregations and offer them more significant ways to clean up waterways. In some cases, it will also pay for technical assistance and design of those remediation projects from partner groups such as Blue Water Baltimore and Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.

"We see our role as helping congregations graduate beyond changing lightbulbs and hosting recycling days and move into high-impact work that serves as a demonstration for the whole community," said Rose.

Memorial Episcopal Church in Baltimore, for example, expanded a tree-lined area on its property so that rainwater is now captured and filtered in tree pits rather than going into the municipal stormwater sewer system. With a \$3,000 grant from Baltimore Gas and Electric, the church was able to rip up 1,200 square feet of sidewalk and enlarge the area around the trees by 36 percent.

Thirty children from area schools then completed the project by amending the soil around the trees with leaf compost, earthworms and mulch. In the process, they learned about trees and their role in a healthy ecosystem.

The church has since worked on numerous other projects, including building a pollinator microhabitat and outdoor classroom at a local public school.

"We consider ourselves a green church and we're proud of that," said Dick Williams, a church member and a consultant on sustainable building certification, who led the project. "We wish to do more."

Williams said Interfaith Partners helped educate church members on the dangers impervious surfaces pose for the health of waterways. It also identified potential grantors to fund the proposed work.

That kind of assistance is key, said Rosemary Flickinger, volunteer garden manager for the Kadampa Meditation Center of Maryland.

When the Kadampa Center moved into its new building in northern Baltimore, it had recurring flooding in its parking lot after heavy rainstorms. The temple's leadership asked Flickinger to look into possible grants to do some remediation work.

"I discovered the Chesapeake Bay Trust had a grant that was available," said Flickinger. "But I'd never written a grant before. Interfaith Partners said: 'Don't worry about it. We'll help you.'"

The temple was able to secure a \$30,000 grant (with a matching \$30,000 in labor) to install three rain gardens. It has since added a rooftop cistern.

Interfaith Partners is now expanding its work in rural areas, such as Wicomico County on the eastern shore of Maryland.

The region, which is heavily agricultural and vulnerable to sea rise, recently formed a core group of a dozen religious congregations, including a mosque and a Baha'i temple, to work together on environmental projects. The [Wicomico Interfaith Partners for Creation Stewardship](#) has not only planted trees and cleaned up streams, its members have built community and camaraderie.

"Folks here see the importance of taking care of the land," said Matthew Heim, a volunteer organizer for the group. "That brings a lot of people to the table."

The challenge now is to get megachurches with huge facilities and massive parking lots on board. "We're going to continue trying," said Heim.

Interfaith Partners has also forged a good working relationship with the city of Baltimore.

"We're limited in what we can do on private property," said Mark Cameron, who works on watershed planning and partnerships in Baltimore's Department of Public Works. "That's where IPC comes in. They're helpful in expanding the reach of what we're able to do and helping people understand it's not just the city's role to have cleaner neighborhoods, cleaner waterways and a cleaner bay."

Jenkins, the church volunteer who helped plant the trees last month, is also a professor of environmental humanities at the University of Delaware. But he said he's especially proud of the way his Presbyterian church has stepped up its game on the environment, in part because of Interfaith Partners, where he now serves on the board.

"Environmental activity is part of our MO," said Jenkins. "It's not quirky or eccentric or on the periphery. It's central to what we do."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/interfaith-group-finds-willing-partners-restore-shared-watershed>

January 3, 2019

Learning to say grace: The theology and politics of eating

By Norman Wirzba
ABC Religion and Ethics

"What's for dinner?"

As a kid, this was one of my favourite questions to ask. So much anticipation was built into it. An answer like, "Roasted chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, red cabbage, carrots and a slice of *Streusel Kuchen*," worked to dissolve the troubles of the moment, while a reply like, "Just some leftover soup, no dessert today," was enough to put me in a bad mood. Things haven't changed much now that I am an adult. The prospect of a good meal is enough change the feel of one's day.

Why does food exercise such visceral power over our imaginations? How is a meal able to transform — for good or ill — the shape and mood of the day?

I realise that for some people the questions are different. Too many in our world (still) worry that there won't be a meal at all. They find themselves in unjust economic and political contexts where food has been allocated for other purposes — like the servicing of national debt — or has been priced beyond reach. Others, meanwhile, have a love/hate relationship with meals. Food isn't a gift to be savoured. It is, instead, an enemy that makes them sick or fat, or it is a tool deployed by marketers to signify one's status or evoke personal shame. And for yet others, eating isn't about very much at all. Food is simply the fuel we ingest — preferably as cheaply and conveniently as possible — to keep us moving along.

In the last hundred years or so, the thinking most people do about food has changed decisively. This is because people the world over have been, or are being, reduced to a shopping relationship with food. They do not hunt or gather their food. Nor do they grow it. Owing to unprecedented developments in production, processing, refrigeration and distribution, many people are now absolved of the need to know where food comes from, what practical skills are necessary for its procurement, and what affections and sympathies are crucial for the protection of the ecological processes and cultural traditions that make eating possible and, potentially, a joy. For an increasing number, eating now resembles a magical show: all you need to do is show up, pay some money, and the food will appear, much like bunnies and flowers pulled from a hat. Or you can sit on a couch, surf the web, peruse the (highly stylised) pictures, click a button, and before you know it, the food shows up at your door.

Never before in the history of humanity have people had to know, do, or care so little to enjoy so much food. This is because the industrial methods associated with the Green Revolution — synthetic fertilisers and herbicides, new seed varieties, increased irrigation, monoculture fields, concentrated animal feeding operations, heavy use of pharmaceuticals, reliance on fossil fuels and the consolidation and corporatisation of farming sectors — have produced more calories than the world has ever witnessed. All in all, it is a monumental feat. Without this production, millions of people in the twentieth century would have starved. Which is why Norman Borlaug, the man most associated with the Green Revolution, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.

But has this production boom been an unqualified success? Should we not worry about an accounting system that leaves few lines for net and, in some cases, permanent loss?

My aim is not to make light of the suffering that hunger induces — suffering that is inexcusable in a world awash with food. Nor is it "to turn back the clock" and argue for outdated agricultural methods that wasted soils and produced poor harvests. It is, instead, to draw our attention to the

fact that recent high yields have come at a very high ecological, agricultural and human cost: depleted and degraded fresh water, mined and eroded soils, systemic animal abuse, (plant and animal) species biodiversity loss, agricultural worker abuse, fossil fuel dependence, growing farmer anxiety and debt, and an industrial diet that makes many of its eaters sick. The industrial system that has yielded all these calories, and freed most people from the hard work of growing food, has also created the most ignorant, negligent, and arrogant eaters the world has ever known.

Having become presumptuous and naïve about food systems, eaters are hardly in a position to advocate for ecological well-being, agricultural justice and social and personal health.

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What should be done? We can make a good start by learning to say grace at mealtimes.

On the surface, my recommendation hardly sounds promising. It is true that some people still have the humility to bow their heads before raising their forks. But have we not moved beyond such an old-fashioned ritual? We don't need to say grace because we purchase the food we need with money we have worked (more or less) hard to acquire. The purchase online or at the store is the realisation of a contractual relationship which, at its conclusion, entails no further responsibilities on our part. But does a contractual relationship to food exhaust the meaning or significance of what happens in a meal? Does it do justice to the life and death struggle that eating represents?

Multiple traditions have encouraged the practice of saying grace because they assume that food is fundamentally a *costly gift*. It isn't reducible to being a commodity that we work to obtain as cheaply and conveniently as possible. As they might frame it: the moment a commodity logic takes hold of an eating imagination, is also the moment when places and creatures are made to fit within an efficiency obsessed, profit maximisation calculus that will do considerable damage to eaters and what is eaten alike.

Put another way, if food, understood as the *means of life*, can be reduced to a commodity, it is but a short step to the conclusion that *life itself* is also a commodity, fully susceptible to the power plays of possession, manipulation and profit. In a world such as this, no place and no creature are safe, because nothing is sacred. Land, water, plants, animals, workers and eaters — all can be exploited to maximise somebody's bottom line.

The practice of saying grace can take many forms, but at its core we find an acknowledgement that eating should evoke a grateful disposition within us. Why? Because, as those practically and intimately involved in the growth of food know, all of one's best efforts to produce food might still result in a failed crop or a diseased and dying animal. One may prepare a plot, put seed in the ground, nurture and protect the plant, and still not witness the growth of delicious fruit. Germination, growth and health cannot simply be willed into existence or fully controlled by us. To garden or farm the land, and to husband one's animals, is, therefore, to be faced continuously with one's own impatience and impotence.

But it is also to engage the surprise and mystery of life that comes from beyond anyone's knowing and planning. To encounter mystery, and to appreciate that eating ultimately rests on the humble *receiving*, rather than the arrogant *grabbing*, of life's gifts, is to believe that saying thank you or saying grace is an appropriate, even if imperfect and incomplete, gesture.

To whom should eaters be grateful? One can start by expressing thanks to growers and cooks, and family and friends gathered at the table. These people deserve our thanks because their skill, creativity and love — none of which are necessary — have transformed simple grain into delectable bread, and mere physical proximity into convivial companionship. When I ask people to recall some of the happiest and most transformative moments in their lives, I am no longer surprised by how often food and a dinner table are at their heart.

One can continue by expressing gratitude for the lives and the deaths of the plants and animals that make it to your plate, and for all the marvel-inducing ecological processes that turn sunshine, rain and soil into fabulous fruit. Think about it: we have barely begun to understand the complexity and diversity of the mostly unseen, microscopic dramas being played out beneath our feet — dramas that receive the death happening above ground, and then transform that death into fertility and the possibility of new life. To take a close and patient look at the dramas and histories presupposed by every bite, is the first requirement of the thoughtfulness that defines thankfulness.

One might even go so far as to say thank you to the ineffable, incomprehensible, sacred power that sustains and nurtures reality, and seems to circulate through every bite. Creatures are not the source of their own life. That there is life at all, rather than not, speaks to life's gratuity. Is it possible that the loving intention that prompts a cook to prepare a meal for guests is somehow analogous to the divine intention that creates the feast of life some call *creation*? If it is, then the appearance of food, no matter how humble, is, at least potentially, the nutritious articulation of a human and a divine pronouncement that says, "I love you."

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The Kentucky farmer and poet Wendell Berry gives us one formulation of saying grace in his short poem "[Prayer after Eating](#)" (first printed in his 1973 collection of poems entitled *The Country of Marriage*):

I have taken in the light

that quickened eye and leaf.

May my mind be bright with praise

of what I eat, in the brief blaze

of motion and of thought.

May I be worthy of my meat.

In this blessing, eaters are not simply casting a pious veneer on an otherwise mundane act. They are, instead, asking to be repositioned in the world as eaters who acknowledge the grace and giftedness of life, and who offer thanks and praise to a power that nurtures and sustains life. In this repositioning, eaters relinquish the desire for complete possession and control, and try to become the ones who receive and share, nurture and protect, the creatures that feed them.

This means that saying grace isn't simply a religious act. It is also a political and economic act in which eaters ask to be transformed so that they become the protectors of life, the defenders of farmers and cooks, and the nurturers of food sheds and communities. If so, then the effect of saying grace would be radical and revolutionary at the same time: *radical* because it would draw our attention and affection to the sources of life; *revolutionary* because it would turn our energy and commitment to the building of a just and flourishing world. It is by giving our attention and care to the preservation and celebration of creatures that we become worthy of our meat.

At root, to say grace is to want to pronounce an "Amen" upon this world and its life. But to say a genuine Amen, one must also be able to affirm what is going on as good and right, because to say "Amen" is (literally) to say, "Let it be so." It is to want what has happened to happen again and again, because its occurrence is praiseworthy and beautiful.

Can people pronounce an authentic "Amen" in contexts of eater ignorance, economic anonymity and systemic abuse? If our answer is "No" or "I have no idea," that may well be a sign that we need to become knowledgeable about from where our food comes, and advocate for a more just and compassionate food system.

Eating has never been a simple or easy act, because for any creature to eat, another creature, whether seen or unseen, must die. This is a holy and humbling mystery no eater can finally evade. Mindful and grateful eating, the kind of eating that is framed by a grace-saying life, will be the kind of eating that seeks to extend the creativity and care at work in the kitchen, and the hospitality and celebration in evidence at the dining table, to the whole world.

No bowl or plate of food stands alone. Every bite joins us to a table, which joins us to a kitchen, which joins us to a garden or barn, which joins us to fields and weather, which joins us to ecosystem and meteorological processes, which joins us to ... the divine delight that first declared the world to be good and beautiful — and delicious.

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<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/rethinking-the-human-in-the-anthropocene/10567192>

January 3, 2019

From wildfires come acts of kindness for those trying to recover

By Christina Gray, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Deacon Ray Helgeson left his home in Paradise on the morning of Nov. 8, 2018, with his wife, Donna, for daily Mass at the close-knit Butte County town's only Catholic church. They never arrived.

On the short drive to St. Thomas More Church, where the deacon assists at Mass and heads the parish's adult faith formation program, the Helgesons saw billowing smoke and a nearby peak in flames. They continued warily in the direction of the church but were soon intercepted by emergency crews, who diverted them from what would become California's most destructive wildland fire.

The Camp Fire burned more than 153,000 acres, destroyed more than 14,000 homes and caused 85 fatalities, with several people still reported missing as of Dec. 6.

The fire left more than 80 percent of Paradise residents, including the Helgesons, essentially homeless and had a devastating impact on St. Thomas More parishioners, with an estimated 640 losing their homes out of 800 on the official roster.

"This stuff really confuses you," Deacon Helgeson told Catholic San Francisco, newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. He made the comments in a Nov. 28 phone interview from his son's home in Citrus Heights outside Sacramento, a 90-mile drive from Paradise.

He and his wife arrived Nov. 8 with the clothing they wore to church that morning, a short supply of necessary medications and Deacon Helgeson's breviary. Like many residents, they have not been back to the fire zone, where recovery efforts are still underway, but have confirmed that their home is gone.

"Stability for human persons is huge and we don't have a place now to call home now," Helgeson said. "If your faith is weak, it's going to be extra tough."

St. Thomas More Church and School were spared, but the parish hall and rectory were gutted.

Many displaced people have found refuge in the college town of Chico about 22 miles from Paradise. A campus Newman Center located a block away from St. John the Baptist Church has served as the spiritual and organizational epicenter for the displaced from St. Thomas More. St. John the Baptist is one of two Catholic parishes in Chico.

On Nov. 18, 10 days after the fire began, Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto celebrated a Mass for St. Thomas More fire survivors at the center. On Nov. 25, the center offered a special Mass for St. Thomas More parishioners.

Jim Collins is a St. Thomas More parishioner and retired educator who is acting as commander-in-chief of a relief and communications center set up in the Newman Center hall. Collins, a

Grand Knight in St. Thomas More Knights of Columbus Council 7772, is one of the few parishioners whose house didn't burn.

Of the 107 Knights in the council, 69 lost their homes.

"This is really Job territory," Collins said. "That imagery is perfect here."

Collins and a small crew of fellow Knights spend their days tracking down missing parishioners, communicating with family members about their safety and whereabouts, helping find housing for survivors, distributing donated clothing, money and gift cards, and raising money for long-haul recovery, he told Catholic San Francisco during a visit to Chico Nov. 29.

Collins pointed to rows of brand-new backpacks filled with toiletries, scarves and little luxuries. The included greeting card was signed by Deacon Dominic Peloso and his wife, Mary Ann Peloso, from the Church of the Nativity in Menlo Park.

"We're buried in backpacks!" Collins said. "Just this morning, we got all of these backpacks and \$9,000 in gift cards from your archdiocese."

Fellow Knights Bill Vichi and Greg Wright are longtime St. Thomas More parishioners who arrived to help Collins. Nothing in their words or manner betrayed the fact that both were made homeless by the fire as they greeted Collins with back-slaps and jokes.

Vichi later shared that he lost everything.

"Actually I'm not distributing gift cards here today, I'm getting them," he said matter-of-factly.

Wright had even less reason to smile but did so easily and often. He was a renter without renter's insurance, among those worst off after a disaster because they lack resources to start over, Collins said.

"I will follow wherever the Lord directs me," Wright said.

Until Nov. 30, the Newman Center hall also served as an administrative home base for the Paradise parish. The effort was organized by St. Thomas More pastor Fr. Godwin Xavier, parish plant manager Greg Kidder and Deacon Helgeson. Kidder helped Xavier escape the rectory before it was destroyed and risked his own escape by taking the time to bring valuable parish records with them.

"Compared to what other people lost, mine is just little," said Xavier, who was installed at the parish only five months ago. "I don't care about that."

On Nov. 30, St. Thomas More parish administration and relief efforts moved to Our Divine Savior, a Catholic parish in north Chico, at the Sacramento diocese's direction.

Xavier said he intends to reintroduce the weekly night of "centering prayer" the parish offered each week in Paradise. "That could be healing," he said.

Zooba Zwicker, music director for St. Thomas More, and her husband, Clint Freedle, lost their home and his successful construction business in the fire. Still, she arrived to talk to Collins about music and logistics for the funeral of parishioner Larry Campbell Dec. 15. Campbell, who was terminally ill with cancer, escaped the fire with his wife but died two days later of a stroke.

Helgeson, who travels between Citrus Heights and his home parish three days a week for his pastoral duties, said the disaster has had its positive side.

"Something like this awakens something within us," he said. "It gives the Lord a chance to pull triggers within us of generosity, of kindness and of gentleness with others."

He said the fire and his faith have forged something new and unexpected in himself and other survivors.

"It's an awareness of being without, but there is also a sweetness to it," he said.

[Christina Gray is associate editor of Catholic San Francisco, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/deacon-wildfires-come-acts-kindness-those-trying-recover>

January 6, 2019

Brazil's indigenous people fight back against Bolsonaro's attacks on Amazon

By Astrid Prange
Deutsche Welle

Germany and Brazil have a long history of partnering on environmental protection. But President Jair Bolsonaro's stances on Brazil's indigenous people and their lands threaten the progress that has been made.

"Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was convinced that the country was big enough for nature reserves and agribusinesses to exist side by side," says Thomas Fatheuer of the Kobra network, which connects activists and academics focused on Brazil. Fatheuer knows the country well, as he lived there for 20 years and headed the Rio de Janeiro office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the German political foundation affiliated with the Green party . "But," he says, "the message of the new President Bolsonaro is that Brazil now needs to give more space to agribusiness."

After being sworn in, Bolsonaro wasted no time to make good on his promise. He started by shifting the power to designate indigenous land and nature reserves from Brazil's Ministry of Justice to the country's Ministry of Agriculture, which is headed by agricultural lobbyist Tereza Cristina Dias.

Bolsonaro also made lawyer Ricardo Salles Brazil's new environmental minister. While serving as environment secretary for Sao Paulo state between July 2016 and August 2017, Salles controversially allowed industrial companies to operate in nature reserves.

Indigenous peoples fight back

Bolsonaro recently took aim at the country's environmental agency Ibama on Twitter, saying that it was an "industry of fines" and that "fewer than one million people live in the isolated reserves for indigenous peoples, who are exploited by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)."

The country's indigenous peoples, meanwhile, are not putting up with Bolsonaro's accusations and fiercely oppose his plans. Leaders of the indigenous Apurina and Aruak Baniwa communities penned an open letter dismissing the allegation of NGO manipulation and instead criticized the government's inefficient policies towards Brazil's indigenous peoples.

The letter said that "we do not want our numbers to be decimated" through new agribusiness practices, and they "reject political paternalism and being forced to assimilate." The leaders stressed that they "want to remain indigenous and demand that our ethnic identity be respected."

Bolsonaro's focus: The almighty real

Yet [the new president's stance on environmental matters](#) could undermine the indigenous people's demands for self-determination. His government views Brazil's indigenous peoples as business partners, who he believes want to earn money, trade, mine gold, harvest precious wood, and rent out land — just "like all Brazilians."

Thomas Fatheuer says that the government and corporations are "paying serious money out of the petty cash box to pay indigenous leaders to get them to agree to mining on their indigenous lands."

He says indigenous tribes were already being pitted against each other regarding the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam complex on Xingu River, a tributary of the Amazon, and he foresees a major conflict over the legalization of mining on indigenous lands in coming years.

Deforestation continues unabated

Indigenous protected lands, which are legally the property of the state, comprise 13 percent of Brazil's total territory. The country's indigenous peoples live off these areas, which are situated in the rainforest, and are expected in return to contribute to its protection. Mining activity is prohibited in these protected areas unless the Brazilian Congress and the respective indigenous tribes inhabiting the area agree to allow it.

Since 2004, ever greater swathes of territory were designated indigenous land and nature reserves. This has helped significantly slow the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INEP) reported that deforestation dropped from an annual 25,000 square kilometers (9,652 sq. miles) to just 5,000 square kilometers in 2014. Yet since then, slash-and-burn clearing and logging are again on the rise. It is estimated that 7,900 square kilometers of rainforest were destroyed in 2018.

"Much progress had been made regarding the protection of the rainforest," says Brazil expert Fatheuer. Which is why, in his view, so much is at stake now. Fatheuer, like so many NGOs and the German government, wonders what will happen to German-Brazilian environmental cooperation now that Bolsonaro is in charge. After all, Germany and Brazil have a long history of joining forces to protect the environment.

After the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl initiated a pilot scheme to protect the tropical rainforest, together with the help of leading industrial nations. Between 1992 and 2009, Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provided more than €300 million (\$340 million) to this cause. Today the BMZ also contributes to the Amazon Fund for Forest Conservation and Climate Protection.

Saúde e Alegria is an award-winning development project that aims to improve healthcare and economic development in the Amazon. In the past, the initiative partnered with Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. But now with Bolsonaro in power, project coordinator Caetano Scannavino fears that if logging and gold mining are legalized, all the good work could be undone.

He thinks Bolsonaro's government lacks economic know-how. In Scannavino's opinion, "there is nothing romantic about protecting the environment because it is the very foundation for economic growth." Adding that "the Amazon brings water to all of Brazil; and anyone who cuts down the rainforest and plants soybeans harms the agriculture in the south — which our economic and agricultural ministers need to understand."

<https://www.dw.com/en/brazils-indigenous-people-fight-back-against-bolsonaros-attacks-on-amazon/a-46974782>

January 8, 2019

Indonesian archbishop urges Catholics to ditch use of plastic bags

By Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Jakarta, Indonesia — Months after Indonesia's military was summoned to unclog Jakarta Bay, Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo has joined a chorus of disapproval of the nation's growing plastic waste problem by calling parishioners to action.

[Ucanews.com reported](#) that, through a video messaged shown across all parishes nationwide Jan. 5-6, the prelate appealed to all Catholics to reduce their use of plastic and plastic bags due to their harmful impact on the environment.

The news comes as other countries in Asia are starting to waken to the threat posed by mountains of plastic left at refuse dumps or dumped at sea.

Thailand has also embarked on a conservation campaign with retailers now charging for the use of plastic bags on certain days of the months.

China, Thailand and Indonesia are considered the continent's top three offenders in terms of poor waste management.

About 8 million tons of plastic are dumped into the world's oceans every year, the U.N. Environment Programme said in December.

Indonesia deals with about 64 million tons of plastic a year, 3.2 million tons of which end up in the ocean, environmental groups say.

About 11 percent of the total is produced in Jakarta, making the city the capital of Indonesia's waste woes.

Those figures put the country second only to China in global terms. China contributed 8.8 million tons of plastic waste in 2018.

"We are very concerned because our country is becoming the world's second-largest producer of plastic waste," Suharyo said.

Suharyo cited the case of a beached whale that died on Nov. 19 in South East Sulawesi province. A postmortem found its stomach was stuffed full of nearly six kilograms of plastic.

Thailand can boast similar tragedies, ucanews.com reported.

Some 80 pieces of plastic garbage weighing more than 17 pounds were pulled from the stomach of a pilot whale last June after authorities spent five days trying to save its life. Before it died, the animal spat out five plastic bags in a last-gasp effort to avoid suffocating, Reuters reported.

Plastics are broken down into small particles that can make their way into drinking water, seafood and salt, Suharyo said, thus posing a threat to both nature and local populations.

Pope Francis drew attention to the importance of protecting the environment in his June 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si'."

Suharyo urged Catholics to embrace the pope's invitation to care for the environment and asked producers to gradually stop using Styrofoam in their food packaging.

Jakarta produces at least 2.5 million tons of waste each year, 357,000 tons of which is plastic waste, according to Rahmawati, head of the Jakarta's waste management division.

The administration made a commitment in 2017 to reduce marine plastic by 70 percent by the end of 2025, she said. Environmental groups responded by saying the plan was "doomed to fail."

That same year, the central government launched its "Indonesia Free Waste 2020" campaign. It began with a trial policy of instructing retailers to charge customers 200 rupiahs (less than 1 American cent) for each plastic bag used.

Some local governments in Indonesia have followed suit with more environmentally friendly messages.

Last April, for example, the mayor of Surabaya in East Java said bus passengers could enjoy a free ride on the city's public transportation system for every 18 plastic bottles or bags they collected.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/indonesian-archbishop-urges-catholics-ditch-use-plastic-bags>

January 9, 2019

One synagogue divests from a Carbon Pharaoh Bank

The Shalom Center

“A chronology of divestment: The process by which one Jewish congregation divested its holdings in fossil fuels”

By Members of Kolot Chayyeinu

[This essay begins a series of Shalom Reports on how individual congregations can act to heal their neighborhoods from the Carbon-burning danger of local diseases like asthma and strange cancers, and the Earth from the Carbon-burning danger of climate chaos. -- AW, editor]

Kolot Chayyeinu, which translates as Voices of Our Lives — is a progressive Jewish congregation located in Brooklyn, NY, which was founded in 1993, and where social justice is an important priority and shared value. Our mission statement includes the lines...*we are creative, serious seekers who pray joyfully, wrestle with tradition, pursue justice, and refuse to be satisfied with the world as it is....we search for meaningful and just expressions of our Judaism in today's uncertain world.*

Background: Perhaps the beginning of our journey occurred on a cool spring evening in 2015, when a few dozen members of Brooklyn's Jewish community sat in the informal garden of a neighboring synagogue to listen to the featured speaker, Rabbi Arthur Waskow. He had been

invited to talk about the particularly Biblical obligation to be environmentally active. It wasn't very much in our Jewish tradition in recent centuries -- for a variety of historical reasons -- he said. But we lived in different times, and it was now very much a Jewish responsibility. And Rabbi Waskow gave us some financial advice. He suggested that divestment from our oil-steeped banks was the most potent tool to counter the dire effects of climate change and global warming. We Kolotniks took careful note. Our financial assets were entirely with Chase Bank, which we knew invests heavily in fossil fuel projects.

Our climate change committee formed about a year later, in the fall of 2016 and riffing on the now-famous protest line, "There is no Planet B" we named ourselves the *Planet A Working Group*. At some of our earliest meetings our five member committee discussed divestment, and quickly and unanimously voted for it to be our first priority. But we also wanted to understand the several climate change issues and fossil fuel projects, from the perspective of bank-funded operations, both far from us and close to home.

As a community, Kolot became committed to supporting the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Our then- student rabbi, Miriam Grossman, had previously lived on Standing Rock Reservation working for the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, a Lakota organization which fights pipelines coming through sacred lands. Miriam maintained relationships with co-workers and friends who became Water Protectors and leaders in the struggle. In 5777, Miriam shared their call to action with us in a Rosh Hashanah sermon and mobilized with the community to raise thousands of dollars for the Water Protectors before joining the Oceti Sakowin encampment herself.

And the Water Protectors, as they were known, drove home Rabbi Waskow's message with their thoroughgoing analysis of banks' ties to fossil fuel extraction, and the roughshod abuse of native people's rights. The Water Protector's leadership implored allied activists to protest at bank locations and divest accounts at Citbank and TD bank in particular, as well as Chase, Bank of America and Wells Fargo.

Closer to home, two major natural gas pipelines — the Pilgrim Pipelines — were being planned; they would run under the Hudson River and skirt the Indian Point nuclear reactor. Not coincidentally, these two conduits were also going to cut through native lands — in this case, the traditional territory of the Ramapough-Lenape Nation. We researched the financial institutions which were behind Pilgrim and the Dakota Access, learning that not coincidentally many of the same entities were involved in both, including Chase.

Perhaps the equally seminal event, though, that left us with the feeling that we ourselves were newly vulnerable to global warming, was Superstorm Sandy, which had made landfall just south of us only a few years earlier, in 2012. Sandy had pounded coastal New York, including the Rockaways and Red Hook, two New York City neighborhoods not far from our congregation. About 230 people in eight counties died as a direct result of the storm, and thousands of others are still rebuilding. But as climate scientists are advising, Sandy was only a warning shot. These storms will only grow in frequency and ferocity with global warming and large swaths of the City will likely be underwater before the end of the century.

The Process: Our task was relatively simple. All of our money was in Chase, and since we don't own our own building, we have no mortgage. Given that our resources were entirely liquid, we believed that moving them would be fairly straightforward. So our foremost and most important task was to undertake an analysis of the best place to move our money to.

Through the following year, 2017, the members of Planet A visited almost all of the local banks in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, where Kolot is located, meeting with managers, reading annual reports and submitting financial statements to our banking-savvy members for their analysis. And although not in our neighborhood, we added one of the most well known union-created banks, Amalgamated Bank, that was founded in 1923 by the Union of Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

Amalgamated's stated mission resonated with our own... *to be the financial institution for progressive people and organizations: those who are working and living to make the world more just, more compassionate, and more sustainable.* Amalgamated had committed itself to supporting organized labor, creating affordable housing, and more recently they'd adopted a strict policy of renewable-fuels investment. Any proposal that contained a whiff of fossil fuels would be rejected out of hand.

By the Fall of 2017, with the help of our treasurer and executive director, who had become directly involved at this point, we narrowed down the choice of eligible banks to two — a local savings bank, within walking distance of our office, and Amalgamated. Safeguarding our deposits and withdrawals and the convenience of the banks were our major concerns, but it became clear fairly quickly that with the advent of remote, computerized banking and improvements in its online security procedures, Amalgamated could match our requirements in both areas. Our decision was clinched when we learned that the local savings bank had made loans to a predatory landlord. We obviously couldn't exchange one unsavory bank for another, even if it had no interests in fossil fuels.

We were surprised and excited to learn that we would be the first American Jewish congregation to publicly and completely divest.

Our relationship with Chase: Our choice of bank was final now, but at the suggestion of Amalgamated Bank, we spent some time considering how to maintain an ongoing — albeit non-fiduciary — relationship with Chase, in order to put pressure on the bank in a variety of ways to move towards renewable-energy investments. Of course we wouldn't change their portfolio — we are a very small congregation in terms of our wealth and we don't own a building — but we could be a persistent messenger to them.

In terms of how we communicated our decision to Chase management, we made it clear that we didn't hold the individual branch responsible for corporate policy and bore them no hard feelings. Our Rabbi and Treasurer met with a member of our branch's management to explain our decision to withdraw our funds.

Mission statement for the “roll out:”

Our primary purpose is to create an afternoon event that will take place in or near Amalgamated bank, our new bank, that both celebrates Kolot's achievement, as the first Jewish congregation in the U.S. to divest publically from an institution that invests in fossil fuel projects, and also motivates other Jewish congregations to likewise divest their holdings. A well-strategized system of publicity, both conventional and social-media-based will allow the event to be shared widely and also shared over a continuous period, thus magnifying its impact.

APRIL 17, 2018: *The Day of Divestment* was planned to coincide with Earth Day. It was chilly, and threatening rain, but we gathered with feelings of triumph outside the main Brooklyn branch of Amalgamated Bank.

Our press release read: *Kolot Chayeinu community members and supporters rallied at Amalgamated Bank today to announce that the congregation is publicly divesting from Chase Bank and proudly moving their accounts to Amalgamated Bank, in order to divest from the Dakota Access Pipeline, and from the fossil fuel industry. Kolot, the first Jewish congregation in the country to publicly take such divestment action.*

Our ceremony was introduced by an improvisational “Ode to Mother Earth” on flute by a member of Kolot followed by a call and response song engaging everyone.

Who came: We had a strong showing from the Congregation, many younger members included. Our local Councilmember (and Kolot member), Brad Lander, was present, along with Councilmember Carlos Menchaca, many of whose constituents had been severely impacted by Superstorm Sandy. We were delighted that NYC’s Public Advocate, Letitia James was there and we were also honored to welcome Chief Perry and Owl, leaders within the Ramapough-Lenape Nation on whose ancestral land we were standing. A representative of Amalgamated, with whom we had worked to establish our account was also present.

The best way to conclude this account is probably with our founding rabbi’s words.

Rabbi Ellen Lippmann (now retired) said,

This is the first time our community has decided to use its financial power to make change. We are not a large nor a wealthy congregation, but we hope and believe this divestment will make a difference to Chase, and we are so glad to know it makes a big difference to Amalgamated, and to the world in which we live.

Check out the [video](#) that filmmaker (and Kolot member), Lynne Sachs, made of the event:

Or to read our press and see more pics and videos, please visit Planet A’s [fB page](#):

<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/one-synagogue-divests-carbon-pharaoh-bank>

January 9, 2019

First-Ever Indigenous Peoples March Will Fight Against Injustices Faced Across the Globe

By Jessica Corbett
Common Dreams

"Many Indigenous people are victims of voter suppression, divided families by walls and borders, an environmental holocaust, sex and human trafficking, and police/military brutality."

Raising alarm about human rights violations and the global climate crisis, activists from around the world are traveling to Washington, D.C. for the first annual Indigenous Peoples March, which will kick off at 8am local time on Jan. 18 outside the U.S. Department of the Interior's main building.

"It's wonderful—and needed, now more than ever—to see so many tribes and organizations coming together to raise awareness about the ongoing need to preserve and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples," said organizer Phyllis Young of the Lakota People's Law Project.

Launched by the Indigenous Peoples Movement, a newly formed coalition [dedicated](#) to fostering positive change on "issues that directly affect our lands, peoples, and respective cultures," [the march](#) will be preceded by a group prayer at 9am and followed by an evening fundraising concert at the Songbird Music House.

"Indigenous people from North, Central and South America, Oceania, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean are a target of genocide," the organizers [charge](#). "Currently, many Indigenous people are victims of voter suppression, divided families by walls and borders, an environmental holocaust, sex and human trafficking, and police/military brutality with little or no resources and awareness of this injustice."

More than 10,000 marchers are anticipated to descend on D.C. for the event, including people from Australia, Guatemala, Papua New Guinea, Canada, the Caribbean and across the United States. Those interested in participating or supporting the march can check for updates on the official Facebook [event](#), and are encouraged to post updates to social media using the hashtags #IPMDC19 and #WHYIMARCH.

Chase Iron Eyes, lead counsel for the Lakota People's Law Project, said in a statement on Wednesday that his delegation will also advocate for a [Green New Deal](#)—an increasingly popular proposal championed by the Sunrise Movement and other grassroots organizations as well as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and a growing number of Democratic lawmakers that would pair climate and economic policies—"as a way to combat climate change and create green jobs, especially in Indian Country."

"It's going to be a beautiful day," he said of the march. "Our people are under constant threat, from pipelines, from police, from a system that wants to forget the valuable perspectives we bring to the table. But those challenges make us stronger. We look forward to gathering together

and raising awareness. We must remind the world, again, that Indigenous people matter. We are all made better when we respect one another and lift each other up."

Iron Eyes' comments come just a day after global protests spurred by [outrage](#) over the Canadian government's support for TransCanada's plans to build a fracked gas pipeline through unceded Wet'suwet'en territory, despite opposition to the project from First Nations leaders. Public anger ramped up on Monday afternoon, ahead of the demonstrations, after the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) [invaded](#) a checkpoint established by Indigenous land defenders and arrested 14 of them.

Plans for the march also come amid growing concern over the presidency of Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who was sworn in at the beginning of the year and [has not wasted any time](#) launching attacks on the environment and Indigenous communities in his country.

As *Common Dreams* [reported](#), "On his first day in office, Bolsonaro introduced an executive order that will effectively [take away land rights](#) for indigenous Brazilians and descendants of former slaves and [gave control](#) of Amazon lands to the agriculture ministry; eliminated LGBTQ rights from the purview of the country's human rights ministry; and set the [minimum wage](#) lower than the rate his predecessor's government had budgeted for."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/01/09/first-ever-indigenous-peoples-march-will-fight-against-injustices-faced-across-globe>

January 11, 2019

To work toward a just society, we need a Green New Deal

By Alex Mikulich
National Catholic Reporter

Among the many initiatives that offer real hope for the future as the new Congress begins its work in 2019, a Green New Deal is the most timely and hopeful. A Green New Deal is a critical way to practice ecological solidarity in the spirit and word of "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" and create a society devoted to the common good of all.

Undoubtedly, the idea of a [Green New Deal](#) finds immediate opponents on both sides of the congressional aisle and its greatest obstacles include the intransigence, obstruction and plain deceit of the president and the GOP. This deceit, in terms of both climate change denial and occlusion of a corrupt campaign financing system, is killing us and the planet.

Hope and real change, however, are here. The success of the [Sunrise Movement](#) demonstrates the vitality of national youth organizing for real action to combat climate change, electing the legislators and advancing legislation that can make a Green New Deal a reality.

Whereas only a handful of congressional members were aware of, much less committed to, a Green New Deal prior to the 2018 midterm election, protest [actions](#) by the Sunrise Movement have helped put a Green New Deal on the legislative agenda table, mobilized hundreds of national organizations into a concerted effort and gained the public commitment of 45 congressional members, including at least three U.S. senators.

Massive mobilization in support of a Green New Deal may be just in time for the planet. In its October 2018 report on the catastrophic effects of climate change, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) warns that the world may only have 12 years to limit the worst impacts of global warming.

According to the [National Climate Assessment](#), an ongoing U.S. interagency effort to assess the science of climate change, if we do nothing to address climate change, "rising temperatures, sea level rise, and changes in extreme events are expected to increasingly disrupt and damage critical infrastructure and property, labor productivity, and the vitality of our communities."

The National Climate Assessment report warns that "without substantial and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions," impacts include "annual losses in some sectors are projected to reach hundreds of billions of dollars by the end of the century — more than the current gross domestic product of many U.S. states."

In rudimentary terms, a Green New Deal involves a massive program of investments in clean energy infrastructure and jobs designed to entirely transform the energy sector and, indeed, the entire economy.

Rep. Ayanna Pressley, newly elected Democrat from Massachusetts, [describes](#) the vision of a Green New Deal: "It's about our most precious commodity: people, families, children, our future. It's about a move to 100 percent renewable energy and the elimination of greenhouse gases. It's about ensuring that our coastal communities have resources and tools to build sustainable infrastructure that will counteract rising sea levels, beat back untenable natural disasters, and mitigate effects of extreme temperatures."

The idea of a Green New Deal, however, faces headwinds of resistance because it directly challenges the most powerful economic interests that protect the status quo.

Yet the economic success of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's original New Deal was realized only through massive public investments in infrastructure. A walk through City Park in New Orleans or countless national parks, or a drive along the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut reveal only a few of the enduring successes of the Works Progress Administration.

Yet it is also true, as Richard Rothstein uncovers in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, that racial disparities are rooted in a century of governmental and business policy, much originating in the New Deal, that created the structures of housing and educational segregation and the conditions of anti-black violence in places like Ferguson, Missouri.

Unlike the anti-black white supremacy supported by the original New Deal, a key feature of a Green New Deal is its principled focus on a just transition to a green economy by prioritizing communities excluded from benefits of the current economy and most negatively impacted by environmental racism.

Sadly, however, it is unsurprising that neoliberal politicians, Republicans and Democrats alike, complain that a Green New Deal is impractical, too expensive and naively "socialist," that is, big and incompetent government at its worst. Our nation's history tells another story.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan), who is working to make Michigan a leader in green energy, recalls, in an [interview](#) with The Intercept's Kate Aronoff, how the U.S. was "the Arsenal of Democracy and helped saved the planet from real darkness decades ago, and there's no reason we couldn't be one of the regions to build America's green energy infrastructure and help save the planet again in the process."

Indeed, it seems we forget how the U.S. government led the mobilization and transformation of the economy that was integral to the defeat of Hitler in World War II. Government administration of control of prices, wages and coordinating economic sectors were all vital to producing everything the Allies needed for success. Far from a Soviet command-style economy, U.S. corporations boomed and thrived beyond the war.

Conversely, without the mobilization led by the U.S. government in World War II it is unlikely that the private sector alone could have organized the national economy with equal speed and effectiveness.

The fact is that the [politicians](#) who derisively call a Green New Deal "socialism" are the same politicians who take fossil fuel campaign contributions and who fail to question the costs of subsidizing the fossil fuel industry or maintaining a crumbling infrastructure system.

Consider that Oil Change International, created in 2005 to educate about the true impacts of fossil fuels, [reports](#) that the U.S. government spends \$20.5 billion on direct and indirect subsidies to fossil fuel industries. If we add massive expenditures "to acquire and defend fossil fuel interests around the globe," as well as infrastructure spending and maintenance for an antiquated energy system, the U.S. is spending "hundreds of billions of dollars supporting an industry that is destroying our climate and buying off politicians."

Saikat Chakrabarti, the campaign chair for newly elected Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and now her chief of staff, encapsulates how we need radical solutions to address radical problems. He [explains](#) that "The two options are, either we're going to intentionally do the big things we want, or big things we don't want will happen to us."

In other words, we can maintain the death wish of the dominant economic system or we can work together to shape a world where all forms of life may thrive. No doubt, as David Roberts at Vox [argues](#), a "great deal of political and policy engineering ... lies ahead" to meet the three main goals of de-carbonizing our economy, creating green jobs and ultimately nurturing a truly just society.

The work that lies ahead demands a "new and universal solidarity" (*Laudato Si*, 14). The Sunrise Movement is bringing individuals and organizations together in the U.S. for this new and universal solidarity.

A Green New Deal is a moral, economic and ecological necessity. It offers a radically practical and visionary plan that people of faith and justice ought to be advancing, especially over the next two years. It is time to join in this great work of love and justice so all life may thrive.

[Alex Mikulich is a Catholic social ethicist.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/work-toward-just-society-we-need-green-new-deal>

January 16, 2019

The women fighting a pipeline that could destroy precious wildlife

By Joe Whittle
The Guardian

Deep within the humid green heart of the largest river swamp in North America, a battle is being waged over the future of the most precious resource of all: water.

On one side of the conflict is a small band of rugged and ragtag activists led by Indigenous matriarchs. On the other side is the relentless machinery of the fossil fuel industry and all of its might. And at the center of the struggle is the Atchafalaya river, a 135 mile-long distributary of the Mississippi river that empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

The activists gather at [L'eau Est La Vie Camp](#), a resistance encampment set up to resist the [Bayou Bridge pipeline](#), which will cross directly through the river basin to connect shale crude from the Dakota Access pipeline to a refinery in St James, Louisiana. From there, it will be shipped primarily to China.

The "water protectors", as they call themselves, are camped near the path of the pipeline. Many live locally, but others come from afar, often hailing from tribes affected by similar issues, such as the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Their efforts are focused on [public protest](#) to raise awareness, as well as direct actions to impede construction of the pipeline, which they say endangers the Atchafalaya hardwood forest and cypress-tupelo swamp, the largest in North America.

This ecosystem supports half of the continent's [migratory waterfowl](#) and is one of the most important bird habitats in the western hemisphere. It's also considered to be one of the most productive swamps on the planet – roughly 90% of the wild crawfish sold in Louisiana are caught here, making it the last stronghold of bayou Cajun fishing culture.

High on the activists' long list of concerns is the possibility of a devastating spill: data collected by Greenpeace from the US Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration indicates the pipeline's owners, Sunoco and its parent company Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) [experienced](#) 527 spills from 2002 to the end of 2017. According to a Reuters analysis, it had the [worst spill record](#) of all US pipeline companies between 2010 and 2016.

In 2014, an ETP pipeline ruptured 160,000 gallons of crude into Caddo Lake, which flows into the Atchafalaya Basin. The incident devastated the local fishing season.

Caddo Lake

Some tribal stories say that Caddo Lake is the origin place of the indigenous Caddo Tribe, which occupied the region until Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act extirpated them in the 1800s.

Caddo songs tell of an earthquake and flood that formed the lake. Unaware of the approaching danger, some of their ancestors were washed underneath the flood while dancing and singing, and were said to have become fantastic water creatures. Today, the lake is habitat for an abundance of fish and wildlife, including many alligators and snapping turtles – its resident relics of the Reptile Age.

In 1910, an oil company worker discovered gas bubbles emerging from the lake – a sign of oil presence. The lake bottom, which was owned by the federal government, was quickly leased. Soon, the world's first overwater oil rigs were engineered to access the oil. The oil production which followed helped birth the Gulf [Oil](#) Company/Chevron.

As colonial encroachment expanded, Houma people, the southern neighbors of the Caddo, moved further south into the remote swamps of the Atchafalaya near the Atakapaw, Choctaw and Chitimacha peoples. There, they evaded forced removals due to their inaccessible locations. Those conditions also brought escaped slaves into bayou communities, along with exiled Acadian French settlers from Canada. The amalgam of ethnicities and cultures led to what is known today as Cajun culture.

“My grandmother, who was born in 1910, told me stories about how the oil companies stole our land rights away, tricking elders to sign their X's on papers they were unable to read,” says United Houma Nation tribal council member Monique Verdin. “They believed they were leasing land, but in the process they were evicted off their properties.”

In 1994, Exxon began [dumping sludge](#) in a waste dump installed next to the mostly Houma community of Grand Bois, Louisiana, making residents [sick](#).

“We had only 100 women in our community, and probably 15 out that 100 had tumor hysterectomies,” says Clarice Friloux, a Houma resident who helped file a lawsuit against Exxon at the time. “We had two babies born stillbirths with cysts.”

Friloux says she was followed and threatened many times during the lawsuit. “Once, someone called me and said: ‘So, you’re 20 minutes from home, you’re alone, and you have to pass by our facility to get back home. Are you afraid?’”

Once at a gas station, she was accosted by a man she had never seen before. “Do you get sponsored by Levi’s?” he asked. When she said no, he replied: “Well, if I remember correctly at the Monday meeting you wore green pants, and Tuesday beige, and Wednesday black,” making it clear he had been keeping tabs on her. “I’ll never forget his face. I look for him in crowds sometimes,” Friloux says. “He rattled me.”

After Louisiana state senator Michael Robichaux, a medical doctor, [took up](#) the community’s cause, the state finally ordered a toxicology study in 1998.

The state-appointed toxicologist demonstrated a litany of health issues affecting residents, such as breathing, kidney and eye problems, skin rashes, birth defects, learning disabilities, cancer and high lead levels. She [cited](#) environmental contaminants as the likely culprit yet ultimately, she did not testify in court to a conclusive link to the site. (In 2015, after two decades of legal battle, Exxon was cleared of most charges in the lawsuit, but was ordered to pay a total of \$30,000 to residents closest to the site. The waste pits site owner, Campbell Wells, [settled a separate lawsuit](#) for a reported \$7m.)

And then, in 2010, the BP spill happened. It is estimated that 3.9m barrels of oil leaked into the Gulf.

“The BP spill was a disaster for our communities,” says Friloux. “It shut down our livelihood and the ability to provide for our families.” It destroyed the shrimping industry which is vital to the local economy. Similarly, clear-cutting ancient cypress forest and the disruption of sediment patterns by dredging canals and trenches to lay pipeline has choked out the crawfish population.

‘Cancer alley’

It is against this backdrop that people are organizing to fight the Bayou Bridge pipeline, demanding that alternative energy be aggressively pursued and fossil-based production be curbed.

“I know we are not getting off oil and gas anytime soon, but we have to start working towards it,” says Verdin, who is on the Indigenous Women’s Council of the L’eau Est La Vie Camp. “If we don’t believe clean energy is possible, then we’ll continue to witness the fallout, from rising seas and black tides washing into our fishing grounds to toxic drinking water.”

The refinery corridor along the Mississippi river in St James – where the pipeline would end – is known as “[cancer alley](#)”. The mostly African American community is surrounded by refineries, and reports many of the same health issues seen in Grand Bois. No evacuation route exists should disaster strike, and the only bridge across the river was recently damaged by a barge carrying oil industry construction equipment, which closed the bridge for two months. Hemmed

in on all sides by industry and the Mississippi, residents were forced to drive 40 miles round-trip to get essential supplies and to commute across the river for work.

“Forty-one percent of the United States’ water drains through our mighty river,” says Verdin. “The Mississippi Delta is a power point for the planet, a place where water comes to be purified. Yet we are a sacrifice zone.”

Eminent domain was used by ETP to seize numerous tracts of land from property owners. Unable to afford a legal battle against a petroleum giant, most acquiesced, but a few didn’t.

The common ETP practice when a landowner refuses a buyout is to file an expropriation claim, then begin construction on the assumption it will be approved. In one instance however, the claim was not filed before construction began.

The landowners invited activists to set up camp on their property and mount resistance actions. Officers then arrested the activists, who were on land they had written permission to be on (trespassing on pipeline domain is a felony punishable by five years in prison according to a “critical infrastructure” law recently passed in Louisiana).

Construction of the pipeline is now complete on the disputed property, and 18 felony charges remain pending. A lawsuit recently concluded wherein the landowners hoped to win redress. The judge ruled that ETP acted without lawful authority to be on the land. However, he approved the eminent domain claim post-construction, and ordered ETP to pay each landowner \$150 for damages and land seizure compensation.

The landowners intend to appeal the ruling to the [Louisiana](#) supreme court, and a challenge to the critical infrastructure law could go all the way to the US supreme court.

“The critical infrastructure law infringes on the constitutional right to protest,” says Bill Quigley, a law professor at Loyola University who’s representing landowners and activists pro bono. “The statute also violates due process,” he asserts. “A further problem is that it was rammed through the legislature by the oil and gas lobby, who admitted they wrote it.”

A resistance led by women

The strongest voice of resistance leadership belongs to Cherri Foytlin. She is a Diné (Navajo) and Latina mother, and a longtime local of south Louisiana.

Living within an hour of the main camp, Foytlin is there almost daily. In addition to being a movement leader, she’s raising her six children to become the heart and success of the resistance. Her 15-year-old daughter Jayden is part of a group of youths suing the federal government over failing to take action on climate change. Their lawsuit alleges that the government has “violated the youngest generation’s constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property, as well as failed to protect essential public trust resources”.

At camp, Foytlin serves as the timeless Indigenous matriarch role of “aunty”. Her guidance, leadership and wisdom are essential to the community; whether in helping to resolve day-to-day social dynamics, or strategizing the next course of action in their ongoing struggle.

While activists from all backgrounds are welcome, the camp is led by Indigenous women like Foytlin, who guard the ethics guiding matriarchal care for land and water in the Americas since time immemorial. Their bond is not dissimilar to that of any group of warriors on any page in time: they say they are a “frontline family” tied together by intense experiences, some of which have nearly turned deadly.

Foytlin became an environmentalist when she volunteered on the BP spill clean up. “I remember pulling a dying pelican out of the water covered in oil, and thinking that pelican didn’t have a voice and neither did the fisherfolk I was with – who were on their knees crying like children”, she says.

“Our goal is to create space where justice can be found”, she says. “Initially, we had three objectives besides stopping the pipeline. First, to establish an evacuation route for St James (the state says it is evaluating options). Second, to lift up the needs of the Atchafalaya Basin. Third, is to activate a group of people to make a better future for themselves.”

They recently added another goal: to bring light to the brutal tactics being used to attempt to intimidate them into submission.

Foytlin and others in the camp have endured the same type of threats and harassment that Clarice Friloux experienced, and worse. Cherri’s cat was poisoned. She had a brick thrown through her window. She says she was assaulted outside of her home when two masked men stepped out of the bushes and brutally beat her.

Things have escalated beyond assault. Early morning on 15 October 2018, while traveling lawfully on navigable waterway near construction sites, two activist boats were swamped by a larger boat. A dozen people went in the water while the large boat did not stay to help, but instead raced off. Some had to swim to shore, where they were all stranded in the swamp for eight hours.

In a letter to the US Coast Guard and the state requesting an investigation, attorney Bill Quigley stated: “Instead of slowing down and passing safely, the big boat veered very close and made several maneuvers to create large waves ... The people in the boats are ready and willing to give statements about this action. [They] have information about the person who captained the boat.”

Anne White Hat, a Sicangu Lakota (Sioux) matriarch, was there. She’s been having recurring nightmares since. “It’s your worst fear to have your boat sink in the bayou with all those alligators and poisonous snakes out there,” she says.

Witnesses insist they recognized the assailing boat as pipeline security. Nearly two months after the incident, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries law enforcement officers responded to interview victims of the assault. In a statement to the Guardian, a department spokesperson

said the incident had been turned over to the US Coast Guard, adding that “the boat or boats in question of allegedly causing the swamping are all commercial vessels involved in commercial operations”.

“Living through my worst nightmare, while traumatic, was really kind of empowering,” says White Hat. “We had prayers, our wits about us, and we are familiar with the swamp. I truly believe the spirit of the swamp was with us. It was so incredibly beautiful in that darkness before dawn, with a light mist and stars reflecting on the glasslike water, and the glow of red gator eyes peering just above the waterline. I’ll never forget those minutes before we went down.”

Three days later activists traveled to Dallas, Texas, to disrupt an ETP shareholders meeting at a downtown Hilton. Foytlin, and an Ahtna Dene/Standing Rock Sioux woman named Waniya Locke, [gained entry](#) into the meeting, where they confronted CEO Kelcy Warren. They called out unscrupulous actions by the company, pleading with shareholders to curb their brutal tactics.

Both women were arrested by uniformed Dallas police officers working off-duty at the meeting. They were jailed for the night, and Cherri was put in solitary confinement. Approximately one month later Dallas police dropped the charges.

“I’m not going to pretend like the intimidation tactics haven’t been harsh”, says Foytlin. “However, the support and love from local folks who are scared to speak publicly has been much more moving. What I’ve been sad about are the people who believe the same as me, but are terrified to let others know that.”

Despite the monumental challenges, Foytlin keeps her head held high, and the battle continues: “Intimidation works,” she says, “but witnessing courage is like an immunization to that fear. That’s who we are at L’eau Est La Vie.”

<https://amp.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/16/water-protectors-battle-louisianas-next-pipeline>

January 18, 2019

Ethiopia's 'church forests' are incredible oases of green

By Alejandra Borunda
National Geographic

[View the photos with this story here.](#)

When [Alemayehu Wassie Eshete](#) was a boy, he went to church each Sunday. He would make his way along the dry, dusty roads between the wheat fields in his home province in northern Ethiopia. At the end of the trip was the prize: a literal step into another world.

The churches of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church—the dominant religious group in Ethiopia, with nearly 50 million members—were almost always nestled in patches of vibrant, shady forest. Forests, the church’s religious belief goes, were like the clothes surrounding the church at the center—as much a part of the religious space as the church building itself. Wassie would step out of the hot sun and into a beautiful, cool world filled with chattering birds and fragrant plants, a small hotspot of both biodiversity and spirituality.

“From an ecological perspective, it’s like going from hell to heaven,” he says. “You go from dry, hot fields into the beautiful forest. Anyone would see that as beautiful, but for me, the forest is more than that. It’s also a spiritual place where nature is perfect, and you pray to God.”

But when Wassie grew up and started studying biology and science, he realized that the forests he loved were few and far between. In school, he was learning about how important forests were for the ecological health of different parts of the world, and he asked himself: Where are our forests, here in northern Ethiopia? Why are there so few patches left?

Over the past century, nearly all of the native forests in the South Gonder province have disappeared, cleared to make way for wheat fields and grazing land—agricultural endeavors that support the region’s rapidly growing population. Many of the church forests, though, remain, protected by their religious stewards and the communities around them. They are tiny fragments of a lost past, and the center of hope for [conservation and future restoration](#).

The heart of the community

The churches and their enveloping forests have served as crucial centers of local communities, integral parts of both religious and secular life, since the [fourth century A.D.](#) The forests provide a kind of “respectful covering” for the churches at their centers and the riches they hold. Some of them are estimated to be 1,500 years old—tiny, ancient islands of historic habitat in a changed landscape.

In the early 1900s, it’s [estimated that trees covered](#) roughly 40 percent of Ethiopia. But over the past century, as populations grew, the demand for food skyrocketed. Acres of forests were replaced by agricultural fields. Slowly, over the decades, the total amount of tree-covered land shrank—it now hovers at just around four percent of the country. In South Gonder, the fragments of forest are spread over nearly [1,500 tiny patches](#).

Those remaining patches of forest—key sites for biodiversity—are under threat. Invasive trees like eucalyptus, which are highly valuable because they grow fast and are good for firewood, are creeping into some of them. Cattle wandering into the cool, shady forests trample tender young plants and damage the older trees.

The forest’s champion

At first, Wassie focused his research efforts on understanding what was living in the forests and how they might serve as key sites for preserving what was left of the vanishing northern Ethiopian forest habitat. As part of his doctoral studies, he counted different flora and fauna. He

quantified what seeds were present in the soils, which would tell him whether forests could recover and sprout new trees in the future. He measured whether any new trees were sprouting in the first place. And he tracked exactly how wandering livestock were damaging the delicate understory.

Then at some point, Wassie decided that he wanted to focus his energies on protecting the forests—not just on studying them and watching them diminish. He wanted to help the communities that loved and respected the forests to safeguard, restore, and maybe even enlarge them. He had built deep reserves of trust with the priests and communities who cared for the forests he'd studied, and he realized that they could work together to conserve the wild spaces.

At an academic conference in Mexico, Wassie met [Meg Lowman](#), an American biologist whose interest was piqued by a presentation Wassie made about the church forests. Lowman invited Wassie to visit her lab to talk more about the project. When he arrived, he went down a Google Earth rabbit hole, printing out stacks of images of the church forests from above. They could work together to study and conserve the forests, they thought; Lowman had the connections to the U.S. science community to support research, and Wassie had deep knowledge of the forests and relationships with the priests who cared for them.

Wassie brought Lowman to Ethiopia, where they organized a workshop for more than 150 priests, many of whom walked for days in order to attend. The scientists fired up a laptop with a generator and projected Google Earth photos onto a bedsheet, showing the priests how the forests had shrunk over time.

“They were so passionate from the start,” Lowman says, “because they saw themselves as stewards of all God’s creatures. I, as conservation scientist, believe we have a responsibility to save biodiversity. That’s the same goal.”

Building a solution

The most efficient, straightforward thing they could do to preserve the forests, the scientists decided with the priests, was to build low, simple walls that would carefully demarcate the forests and keep wandering animals from lumbering in.

By the next year, Wassie and Lowman had raised enough money to start building. This simple fix, they found, was remarkably effective. Soon, more and more priests asked for help building their own low walls.

Now, a few years later, the pair has helped more than 20 communities [erect walls around their forests](#), and they have a list many times as long of places they’d like to build more. Where walls have been built, the forests are thriving—so much so that some priests have decided to extend their reach, bumping the walls outward so that they can expand their forests even farther. In intact church forests, [water quality is better](#) than in the surrounding fields; [tree seedlings survive](#) more often; and pollinators, important for both the species in the forests and the agriculture around them, buzz.

Many churches have built low walls that keep livestock from wandering into the church forests. Here, a large tree has fallen and damaged one of those walls. A woman on her way to worship walks through the hole created by the fallen tree.

“We were told that most of the forest had been destroyed, and it seemed that there was no hope,” Wassie says. But there are thousands of church forests dotting the landscape, and each one, for him, represents a pinprick of hope for future restoration.

Wassie next wants to figure out how to connect some of the flecks of forest, rebuilding a vast ecological web across the province, however long it takes.

“All the pieces are there,” he says. “Hope, I got from working with the priests. Though churches are under pressure, they are working to protect what we have. We can bring back even more.”

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/ethiopian-church-forest-conservation-biodiversity/>

January 20, 2019

Saugeen Ojibway Nation confronts effects of climate change on whitefish fishery

By Rhiannon Johnson
CBC News

The fishing communities of Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash are finding higher winds and warmer temperatures are affecting populations of lake whitefish in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, which many rely on for their livelihoods.

The fishing communities of Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash are finding higher winds and warmer temperatures are affecting populations of lake whitefish in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, which many rely on for their livelihoods.

Now they're taking steps to document the changes they've been observing and figure out how to adapt to them.

Natasha Akiwenzie, manager of the Bagida-waad Alliance, a not-for-profit research organization founded by fishing families from the communities, said you can tell when someone is a fisherman.

"They do it as a livelihood, as a passion," she said.

"They speak of it almost like a child, like something that they care about, that they believe in and they fight for."

The alliance has begun collecting stories from local fishing families and Elders to preserve their knowledge for future generations.

By collecting this information, Akiwenzie said the alliance also trying to create a baseline of knowledge to assess when the fishermen started to notice things changing in the water.

"We know something's happening and all the fishermen are in agreement with that," she said.

"We've heard many times that climate change is not here yet, which is concerning because we know it is."

No easy answer

Lake whitefish are a species of cold water fish native to Ontario and common to the Great Lakes.

Akiwenzie said fishermen from the two communities have noticed they weren't catching as many, as the whitefish moved into deeper waters from warmer shorelines.

"There's no easy answer," said Akiwenzie. "But hopefully at the end of all of this we can help the fishermen be able to continue their livelihood in a better way."

Kathleen Ryan, manager of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation Environment office and an aquatic ecologist, said lakes are complex systems.

"If something happens to one fish species in the lake, it can affect everything else in the lake," she said.

She said temperature is critical for whitefish populations as it works as a signal to tell them when to spawn and lay their eggs in the fall.

Their eggs also hatch after the winter ice, which has been protecting them all season, breaks up. Without ice, the eggs are exposed to the wind and tide and fewer hatch.

Monitoring program

Ryan is working with the chiefs and councils of Saugeen and Nawash on the launch of the Saugeen First Nation Coastal Waters Monitoring Program, which will have sampling sites all over Saugeen Ojibway territory.

Climate change isn't the only factor affecting the aquaculture of the Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, with invasive species like zebra mussels and round gobies and industry also having effects.

The program will look at fish communities, temperatures, coastal wetlands, aquatic plants and overall water quality.

They are also working with the Bagida-waad Alliance and asking community members to share their cultural and ecological knowledge to help inform a scientific baseline for the study.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/saugeen-ojibway-whitefish-fishery-climate-change-1.4982666>

January 24, 2019

A community in Guyana relies on indigenous knowledge in conservation

By Akola Thompson
Mongabay

- *In Guyana's sprawling Kanuku mountain range, indigenous villagers partner with researchers, scientists and conservation groups for support and to build upon their knowledge and capacity for conservation work.*
- *With traditional territory stretching to the northern border of Brazil, the Yupukari, Wapishana, and Macushi indigenous groups take the lead in conservation within their communities.*
- *The projects are managed through the Kanuku Mountains Regional Council, which was established to help oversee conservation in the 21 communities throughout the Kanukus.*

YUPUKARI VILLAGE, Guyana — If Russian Dorrick is sure of anything, it's that his community is capable of protecting their natural environment here in southern Guyana's epic Kanuku mountain range.

The region is one of the most biodiverse in Guyana: [one assessment in 2002](#) concluded that 70 percent of the country's mammal species and 53 percent of the country's known bird species live there. Spanning more than 5,000 square kilometers (2,000 square miles), the mountains are located in the heart of the Rupununi savanna.

Dorrick and his fellow inhabitants of Yupukari village live alongside the Wapishana and Macushi indigenous groups, who are spread out as far as northern Brazil. In Yupukari, indigenous villagers partner with researchers, scientists and conservation groups for support and to build upon their knowledge and capacity for conservation work.

“We don't have people coming to run our house for us,” says Dorrick, Yupukari's *tashao*, an elected indigenous official responsible for overseeing village concerns and development. “We are our own managers, our own scientists. We are the conservationists.”

The village's base for this work is Kaiman House, founded for visiting researchers and conservationists in 2003 by Alice Layton. It also serves as the conservation center for the black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*) and the yellow-spotted river turtle (*Podocnemis unifilis*).

Various other communities have also gotten involved with projects to educate their young people about wildlife, such as the North Rupununi Wildlife Program and the [South Rupununi Bird Program](#). These are areas where endangered species such as the [red siskin](#) (*Spinus cucullatus*) and [sun parakeet](#) (*Aratinga solstitialis*) are monitored.

These projects are managed through the Kanuku Mountains Regional Council (KMRC), established to help oversee conservation in the 21 communities throughout the Kanukus. Through the creation of 10-year community plans, the KMRC has helped to sustain monitoring, environmental and resource management and strengthening of management systems in the various communities.

Designated as a protected area under Guyana's laws, the Kanukus are the responsibility of the National Protected Areas Commission (PAC).

“When people hear the words ‘protected area’ they think it means you can’t use it at all,” Rudolph Robert, the KMRC program manager says in an interview. “So we often have to explain that you can still use it, but on a subsistence level.”

He adds that mistrust often arises out of confusion.

The indigenous experience

Camila George, a resident of Moco Moco village, says leaders often ignore indigenous voices when it comes to conservation initiatives. Moco Moco is one of the first villages heading into the Kanukus, two villages away from Yupukari. “Our traditional methods of living birthed conservation, but there have been changes in the way we live due to outside people and this has affected it,” George says.

Thadaigh Baggallay, part of a two-person [team sent](#) by the Frankfurt Zoological Garden to work with the PAC, is responsible for training rangers and planning mapping exercises. Currently, the PAC is looking into the possibility of doing pilot resource projects.

“Yupukari is one of the communities we want to focus on,” Baggallay says. “We’re thinking of focusing on fish and right now we’re working along with the community to come up with some possible rules to be put in place.” Some strategies being considered include the banning of seine nets for three months per year and stopping the use of all poisons in the rivers.

“It is up to us to care for our land and ensure that when we leave, we leave it in a better state than we met it. That is the goal,” says Dorrick, one of the youngest tashao in Yupukari’s history. He says he’s optimistic about the future of conservation in the community, but says the lack of funding severely limits the scope of the work they’re able to do.

According to Dorrick, the community has tagged and marked more than 800 black caimans during the course of the caiman project. Beginning in 2001, the caiman project has a yearly target of tagging 60 of the crocodilians, but a healthy population often results in the capture of

more than 100 caimans. The species' conservation status on the [IUCN Red List](#) was marked "lower risk" when it was last updated in 2000.

But Dorrick claims the black caiman population has declined in recent years. "When we started we had endless numbers, but they are fewer now," he says.

Ecologist Peter Taylor, who helped set up Kaiman House and has studied Yupukari's black caimans extensively, attributes the decline to the rapid extermination of the Orinoco crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*) by hunters.

"Once the population decreased significantly, then the black caiman became the next target" for these hunters, Taylor says. After exploiting most of the black caimans in Brazil, the next target became Guyana, with Yupukari the new point of exploitation.

Taylor first spotted black caimans in Yupukari during an academic trip through Guyana's hinterlands in 1997 with Godfrey Bourne, co-founder of the Ceiba Biological Center, which does environmental research and training. In 2001, he returned to do a feasibility study on whether the black caiman population was significant enough for research.

"It was a really productive trip and we [floated] the idea of building a research station there for several months to study the black caimans," he says.

The researchers would eventually form partnerships with the indigenous population in Yupukari to build a sustainable, long-term pilot project aimed at working with other scientists to gather data and build the community's capacity for conservation.

Turtle porridge

Yupukari is already known for another conservation project, this one centered on yellow-spotted river turtles. In many indigenous communities, the turtles have been overharvested for their meat, Dorrick says. Turtle porridge is a frequent dish in the numerous cultural celebrations observed by indigenous people in the region.

Started by U.S. volunteer Jeffrey Slockum, the turtle conservation project has led to more than 1,000 turtles being incubated, grown and released back into their natural habitats by indigenous researchers.

"First we used to just do markings to go and check on them, but these often led people straight to the turtles," Dorrick says. "So we started digging [patches of sand] but then red ants came and ate some so we didn't have enough hatchlings. It's a learning process, where local people become scientists on their own."

With a survival rate of only 25 percent, extra care is needed when dealing with the turtles as they are very vulnerable as hatchlings. Using camera traps, the team monitors the eggs during the incubation period to ensure they are kept at a certain temperature and that they are not disturbed by predators.

After hatching, the yellow-spotted river turtles, also known as yellow-headed side-neck river turtles, are given names and cared for until they reach one year of age, at which point they are released back into the river. New eggs are collected every January, depending on weather conditions.

Local wildlife researcher Raul Lawrence says the conservationists make sure to let the people know what it is they're doing and why, to ensure their conservation efforts connect with the local population.

"We tell people what we're doing so that when they go back to their communities, they can incubate by themselves," Lawrence says. "It makes no sense doing all of this and releasing them in to the wild only to have people kill them. So we invite communities and host sessions with villagers to let them know the importance of sustaining wildlife. If you make people aware of the importance of conservation, they will understand. Some bring their incubated turtles to the turtle festival."

Depending on water levels, the turtle festival occurs in either April or May, and has contributed to Yupukari's cachet as an ecotourism center.

"Following the success we've had with nesting, hatching and monitoring, people wanted to see what we were doing," Dorrick says. "Tourism really came as a by-product of conservation. We had naturalists and birdwatchers coming but it was mainly the caiman project that brought people. The thing about research education and conservation is that tourism can be tied neatly up with it. We are conservationists and scientists. We do everything on our own here."

Tourism decline

But these hard-earned achievements in both research and nature tourism have taken a hit since the cancellation in 2015 of all flights into the village of Annai, the main gateway to many of the communities in the region, including Yupukari.

Now, those wishing to visit Yupukari and other communities need to seek transportation from the town of Lethem, nearly 120 kilometers (72 miles) farther away than Annai, which is too expensive for many.

Layton, the Kaiman House founder, says they've seen a difference in the visitors who do arrive as a result of the cancelled flights.

"Now we're mainly getting wealthy people," she says. "Before we used to get students, backpackers, but when you make it that difficult and expensive you're only going to get wealthy people."

<https://news.mongabay.com/2019/01/a-community-in-guyana-relies-on-indigenous-knowledge-in-conservation/>

January 24, 2019

Using Art to Explore Indigenous Rights, Activism and Environment

By Dorothy Woodend
The Tyee

Sprawling UBC exhibition is powerful, diverse and compelling

“A sharing economy loses out to a taking economy because, when the takers have done their thing, there is not much left to share.” — George Manuel, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*

This quote accompanies an image of Musgamakw Dzawada’enuxw men posing around three enormous feast masks in a new exhibition called *Hexsa’am: To Be Here Always* at UBC’s Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery.

The work in *Hexsa’am: To Be Here Always* runs the gamut from installation to sculpture, and includes painting, drawing, film, animation and audio pieces from artists Marianne Nicolson (Dzawada’enuxw) and Althea Thauberger (Canadian), among others. The work — some of it created last summer when professional artists and project leaders collaborated with community artists from Kingcome Inlet — documents the struggles for Indigenous land and water rights that have taken place for more than 100 years.

The life-size photo of the Musgamakw Dzawada’enuxw men, taken in 1926, is striking for many reasons. First, the feast masks themselves — enormous and beautiful — and second the men around them, also beautiful. A few are smiling, arms slung over each other’s shoulders. Others look uncertain. Small details leap out: a peaked cap, a straw boater pushed back, and a traditional blanket decorated with pearl buttons pulled tight across one man’s chest. But the quality that is clearest is togetherness. This is a community, united and strong.

The exhibition’s opening night reception, which featured singing and drumming, traditional greetings and acknowledgments from the curators and artists, shared that sense of community. The gallery was packed and people were excited, high on being together. It was fun, thrilling even, but probably not the best way to look at art. For that you need time, space and some measure of quiet.

I returned to the Belkin the following week and slipped in with a group of university students who were listening to artists and project leaders Nicolson and Thauberger talk about the work. After the students wandered back to class, I chatted with Nicolson about the exhibition’s genesis and how it evolved alongside a recent [lawsuit](#) by the Dzawada’enuxw First Nation against the federal government over fish farm licences.

Nicolson explained that her cousin, Lindsey Willie, alerted her to the lawsuit. Willie had been making a documentary about Indigenous protests over fish farms, and stills from the project are

arranged in a rough timeline that flows across the gallery wall in a work entitled *A'axsila (to take care of)*.

Part of the intent was to create a project with the Kingcome community, collaborating with younger artists. Over the summer the group used different methods, including film, weaving, song and animation to make visible the threat posed to land and water. The resulting work documents the effects of extractive resource practices like clear-cut logging and open-pen salmon farms, and also speaks to the ongoing struggle for Indigenous jurisdiction.

Nicolson said she saw an opportunity to combine art and activism and better explain the complexities of the situation. And there is a personal connection; Nicolson is based in [Kingcome Inlet](#), close to the Broughton Archipelago, the site of the contested fish farms.

Looking at what isn't visible

In such an eclectic and varied collection — other artists included Siku Allooloo (Inuk/Haitian Taíno), Scott Benesiinaabandan (Anishinaabe), Darryl Dawson (Dzawada'enuxw), Jaymyn La Vallee (Skwxwú7mesh, Kwikwasut'inuxw and 'Namgis), Diane Roberts (Afro-Indigenous Caribbean, British, Canadian), Sara Siestrem (Hanis Coos), Juliana Speier (Dzawada'enuxw, German and Scottish), Nabidu Taylor (Musgamakw, Dzawada'enuxw), Kamala Todd (Métis-Cree), William Wasden Jr. (Kwakwaka'wakw), Tania Willard (Secwépemc) and Lindsey Willie (Dzawada'enuxw) — there is a tendency to look for a quality that threads its way through the different work.

Nicolson explains that part of the exhibition's ethos was to look at what isn't visible in terms of the environmental impact of the farms. Unlike clear-cut logging, the environmental devastation wrought by salmon farming is largely unseen, hidden underneath the water, she said.

Water, be it a river, an ocean, or a glacier, connects many of the works on display.

Kamala Todd's video *Known and Unknown Trails* from [Digging Up the Last Spike](#), 2018, documents her journey by boat up the Kingcome Inlet (the only way to access the remote area). Scott Benesiinaabandan's installation *Under deep water: Ma'iingan bites my shoulder and we travel home*, assembles a wolf pelt atop a riverbed of different coloured ribbons spilling out of a suitcase.

Nicolson's large-scale painting *La'am 'lawisuxw Yaxuxsan's 'Nalax - Then the Deluge of Our World Came* depicts a catastrophic flood. The work contains images showing how her ancestors managed to survive, lashing canoes to the mountaintops with a cedar rope and surviving on stored food supplies until the water subsided. The image combines oral history and [contemporary events](#), bringing together the spectre of global warming with some aspect of hope based on attachment to the land, ancestral knowledge and a commitment to working together.

If water is an informing element, so is family, in its most joyous and collective sense. It's there in the film of a young boy dancing and drumming, his little yips winging their way across the

gallery. It's clear in the declamatory statements, read aloud by Nicolson and her family, each playing a role in the video installation that gives the show its title.

It's a way of actively reclaiming what was long been taken away.

Power spilling out

Another impetus for the show came from the [McKenna-McBride Royal Commission](#) of 1914 set up to redraw reserve boundaries in British Columbia. In a meeting at Alert Bay, commissioners met with Johnny Scow (Kwikwasuti'nuxw), Copper Johnson (Ha'xwa'mis), Dick Webber and Dick Hawkins (Dzawada'enuxw) and Alec Morgan (Gwawa'enuxw), as well as the Kwakwaka'wakw Chiefs, to determine the details of the land base belonging to the Kwakwaka'wakw group of nations.

The feast masks that anchor the show are central to this story, as the Kwakwaka'wakw people were still celebrating [potlatch](#) long after the Canadian government banned the practice. Due to its remote and hard to access location, the village of Gwa'yi — also known as Kingcome — became a centre for maintaining this tradition.

As Nicolson recounts in her introduction to the exhibition, even when their lands were being taken away by the commission her great-uncles actively practised potlatching, practically under the nose of then-Indian Agent [William Halliday](#). She describes how the Scow Brothers bought cows from Halliday's brother, feasted and potlatched, and then documented the event in pictographs in 1921. Almost 100 years later the images of traditional coppers — large, shield shaped symbols — and cows painted on Petley Point (near Gwa'yi village) are still vivid and bright. The pictographs are documented in Nicolson's film installation, as well as her own large pictograph [Cliff Painting](#), created 100 meters away from the original rock paintings overlooking Kingcome Inlet.

Hexsa'gm: To Be Here Always is part of a larger initiative titled [Mirrored In Stone](#) commissioned by Cineworks and the Belkin Gallery in partnership with the Dzawada'enuxw First Nation. One of the project's intentions was to challenge the idea that First Nations art and culture was only heritage-based and somehow removed from the contemporary art world.

But as Nicolson's artist statement makes clear, these kinds of delineations needed to be obliterated. "We must not seek to erase the influence of globalizing Western culture, but master its forces selectively, as part of a wider Canadian and global community, for the health of the land and the cultures it supports," she writes.

Although there are signs everywhere in the gallery stating: "Please do not touch!", it's hard to quell the impulse to reach out and trace the lines that make out pictographic images of otters, robins and, most poignantly, the eulachon, the small fish at the centre of the fight over the fish farms.

While the salmon farms are only the latest imposition on the traditional territories of First Nations people, the destruction of the land has been ongoing for more than a century. But in spite

of the struggle at its core, the show is not dispiriting. In fact, it's just the opposite. The thing that struck me about the assembled work was the power spilling out, potent and strong — family, joy and beauty, and hilarious little kids dancing, along with a renewed desire for change.

If humans have any hope of sticking around, we need to learn (relearn) a deep and fundamental respect for the land and water. Which returns me to [George Manuel](#), writing in 1974 about the seismic shift in consciousness necessary for all people to live and share together: “The land from which our culture springs is like the water and the air, one and indivisible.”

There is great strength in togetherness.

<https://thetyee.ca/Culture/2019/01/24/Art-Indigenous-Rights-Activism-Environment/>

January 29, 2019

Carbon Dividend Act gets support from head of bishops' justice office

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

A bipartisan bill aiming to place a price on carbon emissions represents "a hopeful sign" that legislators are taking climate change seriously, said the head of the U.S. bishops' domestic justice office.

In a Jan. 25 [statement](#), Bishop Frank Dewane, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, threw support behind the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019. If passed, the bill would place a fee of \$15 on each ton of carbon emissions, increasing \$10 each year, on producers and importers of carbon dioxide emitting fuels like coal, natural gas and oil. The collected fees would then be paid out as monthly dividends to U.S. citizens.

The bill's sponsors, six Democrats and one Republican, say it is revenue-neutral and estimate the carbon fee would cut U.S. emissions by 45 percent by 2030, and as much as 90 percent by 2050, compared to 2016 levels.

"This bipartisan bill is a hopeful sign that more and more, climate change is beginning to be seen as a crucial moral issue; one that concerns all people," said Dewane, who is bishop of Venice, Florida.

He added, "At a time when the dangerous effects of climate change are becoming increasingly apparent, the need for legislative solutions like this is more urgent than ever."

An analysis of an earlier version of the bill, introduced in November, [by the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University](#), found that the carbon fee would apply to most of the

carbon emissions from the U.S. energy sector, which accounts for roughly 90 percent of the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

Discussion of climate change has grown louder on Capitol Hill in recent months, in no small part to several scientific reports, including one from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, that indicate time is running short — [perhaps as few as 12 years](#) — to hold global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius and in doing so, avert the worst impacts of climate change.

An issue often cast aside, climate change also garnered attention through debates about a "Green New Deal," backed by the youth [Sunrise Movement](#) and elevated by freshman Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York). The Green New Deal calls for a rapid overhaul of the U.S. energy sector to 100-percent renewable energy, though specific policies have yet to be outlined.

And while President Donald Trump continues to deny and downplay climate science, each of the early 2020 presidential hopefuls — including Sens. Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand, and former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro — has listed action on climate change as a priority.

The Carbon Dividend Act is one of the first pieces of legislation dealing with climate change proposed since Democrats retook control of the House of Representatives in the November midterm elections. It is co-sponsored by two Florida congressmen, Democrat Ted Deutch and Republican Francis Rooney, along with six other Democratic House members.

The bill has drawn support from the Environmental Defense Fund, the Evangelical Environmental Network and the Citizens' Climate Lobby — the latter a nonpartisan advocacy organization that has worked to bring about bipartisan solutions to climate change, including through the formation of the [House Climate Solutions Caucus](#).

Deutch co-founded the caucus three years ago with Republican Rep. Carlos Curbelo, a fellow Florida congressman who lost re-election in November. Curbelo, who is Catholic, was [joined by a dozen other GOP caucus members who lost their seats](#) in the midterms, while seven others retired.

The bishops' conference has [endorsed the Climate Solutions Caucus](#) in the past, seeing its intentional bipartisan makeup as crucial in order to pass meaningful legislation addressing climate change.

Dewane said the proposed carbon dividend program is but "one possible remedy to addressing" the full costs of greenhouse gas emissions, which include social, economic and environmental factors. He also stressed the need to ensure that a price on carbon does not negatively impact the poor, and that any climate policy must be done "with an eye towards 'the least of these.' "

The idea of placing a price on carbon is not new but has gained some momentum in recent years, including when the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its report on holding global warming to 1.5 C, said that "a price on carbon is central to prompt mitigation."

At the same time, attempts to place a price on carbon have also faced difficulties, either by not being high enough to effect truly significant reductions, or through public rebukes. In Washington state, voters in November rejected a carbon fee of their own. And in France, a gasoline tax aimed at shifting the country toward cleaner energy was put on hold after the yellow vest protests against the tax broke out in late November.

Among those opposing the carbon dividend bill is the Center for Biological Diversity, which criticized that the legislation would prohibit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency from regulating carbon dioxide emissions from power plants for at least a decade.

A letter to Congress earlier this month [from 600-plus environmental groups](#), including several congregations of women religious and Franciscan Action Network, signaled they would oppose legislation that "place profits over community burdens and benefits, including market-based mechanisms."

In addition to being cast as too burdensome on consumers, carbon taxes have also drawn criticism as not doing enough as a response to the enormity of a challenge that climate change presents.

Mark Silk, professor of religion in public life at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, [in a mid-December column for Religion News Service](#) compared using a tax incentive to spur action on climate change to a hypothetical scenario where Abraham Lincoln, rather than abolishing slavery through a constitutional amendment, instead proposed a tax on the ownership of human beings, or where Franklin Roosevelt left pre-World War II mobilization to taxing automobiles to spur car factories to instead produce tanks and planes.

"Taxation — incentivizing good behavior by jacking up the price of bad — deals with a problem indirectly, at one step removed," Silk wrote, offering taxes on cigarettes as one example. "But where the bad behavior has led to a profound crisis, the indirect approach undermines urgency, making for cognitive dissonance."

But the dissonance isn't only cognitive, he added. "There's also what might be called *moral dissonance* — the sense that raising the price tag is morally incompatible with the gravity of the situation. And the greater the moral imperative, the greater the dissonance.

"Why are we talking about economic efficiency when, as everyone from Pope Francis on down has made clear, climate change is causing the most harm to the world's most vulnerable? As it is, we understand environmental protection as a moral obligation," he said.

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<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/carbon-dividend-act-gets-support-head-bishops-justice-office>

February 4, 2019

The White Earth band of Ojibwe legally recognized the rights of wild rice. Here's why

By Winona LaDuke

Nation of Change

“Manoomin, or wild rice, within all the Chippewa ceded territories, possesses inherent rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve, as well as inherent rights to restoration, recovery, and preservation.”

Manoomin (“wild rice”) now has legal rights. At the close of 2018, the White Earth band of Ojibwe passed a law formally recognizing the Rights of Manoomin. According to a resolution, these [rights were recognized because](#) “it has become necessary to provide a legal basis to protect wild rice and fresh water resources as part of our primary treaty foods for future generations.”

This reflects traditional laws of Anishinaabe people, now codified by the tribal government. White Earth's action follows a similar resolution by the 1855 Treaty Authority.

The law begins: *“Manoomin, or wild rice, within all the Chippewa ceded territories, possesses inherent rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve, as well as inherent rights to restoration, recovery, and preservation.”*

The Rights of Manoomin include: “The right to clean water and freshwater habitat, the right to a natural environment free from industrial pollution, the right to a healthy, stable climate free from human-caused climate change impacts, the right to be free from patenting, the right to be free from contamination by genetically engineered organisms.”

The Rights of Manoomin are modeled after the Rights of Nature, recognized in courts and adopted internationally during the last decade. In 2008, Ecuador and Bolivia both added Rights of Nature clauses to their constitutions. In 2016, the [Ho-Chunk Nation in Wisconsin became the first U.S. tribe](#) to adopt the Rights of Nature, and in 2017 the [Ponca Nation in Oklahoma became the second](#). Also in 2017, the New Zealand government [granted the Whanganui River the full legal rights of a person](#) as part of its settlement with the Whanganui iwi, a Maori people. That's the third largest river in *Aotearoa* (“New Zealand”). India [granted full legal rights to the Ganges and Yamuna rivers](#). The Himalayan Glaciers are also recognized as having rights to exist.

This work internationally is intended to bring jurisprudence into accordance with ecological laws and address the protection of natural ecosystems, which has fallen short in most legal systems. As the [Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature](#) explains on its website:

“Under the current system of law in almost every country, nature is considered to be property, a treatment which confers upon the property owner the right to destroy ecosystems and nature on that property. When we talk about the ‘rights of nature,’ it means recognizing that ecosystems and natural communities are not merely property that can be owned, but are entities that have an independent *right to exist and flourish*. Laws recognizing the rights of nature thus change the

status of natural communities and ecosystems to being recognized as *rights-bearing entities* with rights that can be enforced by people, governments, and communities.”

White Earth’s Rights of Manoomin is groundbreaking. “This is a very important step forward in the Rights of Nature movement,” Mari Margil, Associate Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund explains. “This would be the first law to recognize legal rights of plant species.” White Earth and the 1855 Treaty Authority worked with CELDF’s International Center for the Rights of Nature to develop the law.

The Rights of Manoomin reaffirms the Anishinaabe relationship and responsibility to wild rice, its sacred landscape, and traditional laws. Wild rice is also the only grain explicitly listed in a treaty as a guarantee.

“Treaties are the supreme law of the land and we Chippewa have (U.S.) constitutionally protected, usufructuary property rights to hunt, fish, trap, and gather wild rice,” explained Frank Bibeau, Executive Director of the 1855 Treaty Authority. “We understand that it is the individual tribal members’ usufructuary rights to gather food and earn a modest living that are essential to our lives and important for the success of future generations’ ability to maintain our culture and traditions, essentially to be Anishinaabe,” he added. “We understand that *water is life* for all living creatures and protecting abundant, clean, fresh water is essential for our ecosystems and wildlife habitats to sustain all of us and the manoomin.”

The Rights of Manoomin also provides for enforcement. The law declares it illegal for any business or government to violate the rights of manoomin, and declares invalid any permit or authorization or activity that would allow those rights to be violated. Offenses will be punishable under tribal law and offenders will be held financially liable for any damages to the manoomin or its habitat. The law grants powers of enforcement to the White Earth Nation and the 1855 Treaty Authority, and prohibits law enforcement personnel from arresting or detaining those directly enforcing these rights.

During the 165 years since the 1855 treaty, significant damage to Anishinaabe wild rice, waters, maple trees, and prairies has taken place due to state and federal mismanagement. Over 70 percent of the original wild rice territory is now damaged, and today proposals to change sulfate standards to accommodate mining projects and new pipeline projects threaten more wild rice. Ultimately these actions threaten the very existence of wild rice.

In U.S. case law, corporations are considered natural persons and protected legally. In the meantime, much of the “commons,” or natural world – including water, sacred places, and sacred landscapes – have not been protected. This law begins to address that inequality, and challenges the inadequacy of U.S. and Canadian legal systems. “Remember, at one time, neither an Indian nor a Black person was considered a human under the law,” Bibeau reminds us. “Legal systems can and will change,” and in the meantime, the Ojibwe move forward.

<https://www.nationofchange.org/2019/02/04/the-white-earth-band-of-ojibwe-legally-recognized-the-rights-of-wild-rice-heres-why/>

February 7, 2019

Indigenous Brazilians and Environmental Protection

By Suzanne Oakdale
Yale Global

Brazil, the world's fifth largest nation in terms of territory, has more than 250 indigenous groups that make up less than 1 percent of the population, according to the country's 2010 census. Many inhabit the Amazon River basin, the world's largest river system with tracts of virgin rainforest. Researchers document how their cultures rely on an array of sustainable forest and land management practices over the course of centuries in their established territories.

"Anthropological and archeological research in Brazil point to ways that indigenous Amazonians are integral to the protection of biomes, or domains of nature with characteristic flora, fauna, soil and more," explains anthropologist Suzanne Oakdale. She introduces YaleGlobal readers to a body of academic research from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro known as perspectivism that questions boundaries between nature and human culture. "Perspectivism, because of its elegant formulation and its grounding in myth rather than historical complexity, offers a vision of another kind of world possible in the future beyond that of the current world system," Oakdale explains. "As such, perspectivism has the potential to galvanize support in industrialized nations for indigenous peoples and their environments." – YaleGlobal

ALBUQUERQUE: Anthropological and archeological research in Brazil points to ways that indigenous Amazonians are integral to the protection of biomes – or domains of nature with characteristic flora, fauna, soil and more. Such research can call into question the boundaries between the categories of "nature" and "humanity."

Forest management is an ancient practice, and archeology has been key for showing the entanglement of the natural and human worlds. Rather than being categorized as either "wild" or "wrecked," biomes are coming to be seen as "rooted in and contingent on human actions and social configurations of the past," as described in [The Social Lives of Forests](#), by Susanna Hecht, Kathleen Morrison and Christine Padoch. The composition of soils, rivers, flora and fauna reveal the complex relationship between humans and nature over time. Amazonians [started](#) to manage forests about 4,000 years ago, Charles Clement and other researchers wrote in 2015. Long-term occupation formed fertile Amazonian [dark earth](#) from acidic soils, explained Eduardo G. Neves and James Petersen. In some locales such as the Upper Xingu during the first half of the first millennium AD, high population sites were built and connected by roads forming lattice-like structures, the land in between [managed](#) with weirs, ponds, causeways, fields for thatch and fruit trees, according the Michael Heckenberger and others.

Many contemporary indigenous peoples in Brazil – in all 255 different groups comprising less than 1 percent of the Brazilian population, according to the 2010 census – continue forest management with sustainable practices that attract international attention and support. The Kayapo practice of continual low-level burning favors *inaja* and *tucumá* palms and is linked to the formation of dark earth. The [Ka'apor](#) encourage old-growth forest that enhances species diversity, and this practice initiated a [project](#) funded by the World Wildlife Foundation and Rio's

Museu do Índio in 2009 to support distribution of their forest knowledge and help fight logging. Upper Xinguans, who manage their landscape with fire and have monitored rainfall for more than 1,000 years, have a wealth of generational [knowledge](#) about current rainfall changes and conditions leading to uncontrollable fire. The Associação Rede de Sementes do Xingu with the help of the Instituto Socioambiental has enlisted Xinguans since 2007 to gather [native seeds](#) to sell for replanting of deforested areas. With indigenous lands comprising approximately one fifth of the Brazilian Amazon, these kinds of practices contribute to environmental management, explained David Nepstad in 2005.

Another body of work questioning the boundaries between nature and culture is that of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and his students, called perspectivism. Based on his fieldwork with the Araweté and mastery of lowland ethnographies, Viveiros de Castro has put forth an influential general characterization of [Amazonian thought](#) and explains that “Amerindian thought” is guided by “multinaturalism” – a mode that considers humans and animals as united by their common humanity yet with each holding different perspectives. In contrast, “naturalism” characterizes Western thought, a mode founded on a shared biological nature among all living things, but a division between nature and culture, with culture being the force that separates humans from animals. Western thought regards agency and creativity as belonging to humans in contrast to the more passive nature. With the aim of “decolonizing thought,” multinaturalism and naturalism are not simply different cultural perspectives on a shared world, but rather entirely different realities or ontologies.

With respect to the Kawaiwete, a people who have relocated to the Xingu River in central Brazil, multinaturalism characterizes the domains of myth and shamanism. According to Kawaiwete shamans, deep in the forest and underwater live vestiges of beings that populated the earth in mythic times, before humans and animals diverged. These ancient and powerful beings watch over forest animals and consider them their children. These [beings](#) take human souls in revenge for animals killed in the hunt, and they also keep the souls of the sick, the dead and the unborn until shamans can negotiate their return to the human world. Aspects of what many would call part of “the natural” environment are always en route to becoming transformed into the human and vice versa. Animals are also non-human subjectivities, and moral codes guide engagement with them. This sort of ontology “causes the human condition to cease being ‘special’ and to become instead the default mode or generic condition of any species,” explained Viveiros de Castro in 2018. “The domain of nature ... in essence disappears.”

[Critics](#) observe that perspectivism leads to the portrayal of distinctive indigenous traditions in terms that are basically an alter-image of “the West.” Perspectivism has inspired field research in other parts of the non-western world where similar “kinds of thought” have been identified, with some suggesting this leads perhaps to an essentialized “global indigenous thought.”

Multinaturalism has also become a position from which the problems of [capitalist development](#) can be addressed. Perspectivism, because of its elegant formulation and its grounding in myth rather than historical complexity, offers a [vision](#) of another kind of world possible in the future beyond that of the current world system. As such, perspectivism has the potential to galvanize support in industrialized nations for indigenous peoples and their environments. Shamans working through translators like Davi Kopenawa Yanomami have become compelling

[spokespersons](#) far beyond Amazonia for this other way to live. With respect to protecting biomes and habitats, perspectivism offers a vision of both an indigenous world and an ideal future where there is no category of the human differentiated from nature and therefore no human domination of nature.

However, perspectivism can suggest that Amazonians live in separate realities when in fact they confront the material problems shared by all including competition over resources and pollution from fossil fuels. [Lucas Bessire and David Bond](#) suggest, instead, considering peoples' actual working relations with the natural world. This would mean addressing both how indigenous peoples such as the Kawaiwete have shared some goals of multiethnic projects even while they interacted with the mythic beings protecting forest life. These projects include the midcentury government colonization project called the "[March to the West](#)," which in addition to opening areas to exploitation also brought medical experts to the interior, or the recent [introduction](#) of the European honeybee into the Xingu region. Studying how indigenous alterity entangles with projects shared across such boundaries can provide concrete ideas on how or which conservation or even development projects involving Amazonians might work.

Such research contributes to shifting our conceptualization of biomes and habitats and new ways of working toward their protection. Archeology and cultural ecology produce fine-grained understandings of human roles in particular contexts and their historical trajectories. Perspectivism, providing compelling, even if abstract, philosophical positions, can be used as a platform to fight environmental destruction. Critiques of perspectivism document the way environmental protection or degradation happens in more historically specific ways, across interethnic divides and conceptual worlds. All these studies bring greater awareness of Brazilian Indigenous peoples' long history of environmental engagement, crucial in attracting international support.

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February 11, 2019

Meeting people's need for clean water changes sisters' lives, too

By Dan Stockman
Global Sisters Report

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure
—St. Francis of Assisi, "[Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon](#)"

For Art Roche, the realization came somewhere between helping haul 400-pound steel pipes up a mountain in the Honduran heat and humidity, using trees and 10 or 15 people to bend the pipes as needed, twisting giant pipe wrenches to thread pipe sections together, and being outworked by his Honduran compatriots.

Or maybe it came when the enormity of the project became clear: Crews from the little village of Mejote had been working on this pipeline to bring fresh water to their village for two years, and had about another year to go

"We weren't there to do the physical work as much as we were to witness what they were doing," Roche said. "It's the belief and endurance of the Honduran people and their faith that this will work. We weren't there to help — we were there to be with them."

The "we" in this case was a group of about two dozen volunteers brought to Honduras by the [Sister Water Project](#) of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa.

More than 2 billion people worldwide don't have access to drinkable water, water scarcity affects nearly half of the world's population, and almost 1,000 children die of preventable water-related diseases every day, the United Nations [reports](#).

Women religious have [responded](#), from sisters bottling water for disabled school children in Vietnam to providing clean water in Syria, Cameroon and in regions recovering from natural disasters. The sister-led [Water With Blessings](#) has put more than 46,000 water filters in 45 countries, eliminating water-borne diseases where they're used.

The Sister Water Project — named after a mention in a canticle by St. Francis — is just one of dozens of sister-led efforts to bring clean drinking water to those without. But project committee member Sr. Judy Sinnwell said the venture has been as much about changing those involved as it is about changing the lives of those given fresh water.

"When we set out to do this, we were thinking of what would happen out there as we met a need," Sinnwell said. "But what happened in the congregation was it impacted all of us. Each member and associate could do something toward this project: You could pray, make a donation, ask for donations, be part of events. Everybody had a chance to be involved in this — and that changed something in us."

It even changed the physical activities for a 92-year-old sister.

Franciscan Sr. Donalda Kehoe — then 91 — attended a bowling fundraiser last year for the trip and had so much fun she now bowls once a month to stay in shape.

"Being a spectator or a participant in a fund-raising bowling tournament is a rewarding win-win method of almsgiving," Kehoe wrote in response to questions. "It's an event that promotes camaraderie, bonding, conversation and generosity — a method right down my alley."

Roche, recently retired from doing strategic planning for a health system, got involved a year ago. He had read about the project in the local newspaper and heard about it several times at various community events, so when the project committee — made up of sisters, associates and volunteers — needed help with strategic planning, he volunteered.

"I had read about it," he said. "But it hadn't sunk in — the enormity of the project they had taken on." It sunk in eight months later on a mountainside in Honduras.

"[The Honduran workers] saw us as comical," Roche said. "We were clumsy. We had steel-toed boots, sunscreen, gloves — they were wearing jelly shoes or tennis shoes, no sunscreen, no gloves, and worked three times as hard as any of us."

The local crews are made up of men from the village. Each of three neighborhoods takes turns sending a crew up the mountain for a week to work on the pipeline. The pipeline — this one is 32 kilometers long — is necessary because the ground is too rocky to dig wells and the rivers are either unsuitable for drinking from or often dry up. The pipeline will carry water from a spring in the mountains to the villagers below.

"I feel like I need to go there when it's done and drink that water," Roche said.

The Sister Water Project was officially launched in 2006, said Sr. Rita Goedken, who was on the Dubuque Franciscans' leadership team when the project began and was part of the first trip to Honduras. The congregation wanted to meet a real need of the poorest of the poor and for the project to engage not just sisters, but associates, friends and the larger Dubuque community. The project now attracts volunteers from all over the country.

"Safe, potable water became the issue we would focus on," Goedken said. "And we chose two countries where we either had or still have sisters, Tanzania and Honduras."

In November 2007, the project sent its first team abroad — 30 people to the village of Positos, Honduras. Two men from Le Mars, Iowa, who had worked on similar projects before and knew where to get supplies and who to contact, met them there to guide the work, she said.

"By the end of the week, there was a new water tank at the top of the hill and a pump at the bottom, and when water spurted out, people just burst into songs of praise," Goedken said. "They just needed help and supplies and money to do it with."

That project changed the lives of everyone in that village, she said. But it also changed everyone on the team.

"We talked and talked about it later," Goedken said. "The people on the team were just moved by what they saw and heard and experienced."

Sinnwell said the community often talks about a "common heart" — and this project has helped achieve that.

"Something happens in the group, with the shared reflecting as well as just the work," she said. "It's the kind of bridge building we hope happens."

The initial goal of the Sister Water Project was to raise \$42,000 to make a single trip to Honduras. But in the first six months, they raised \$100,000.

"It was just going to be this one time," Sinnwell said. "It shocked all of us."

Thanks to donors and partners, including the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, Holy Spirit Sisters, Salvatorian Missions, and Dubuque Rotary Club, they have raised more than \$1 million. They have completed 20 projects in Honduras and completed or restored more than 200 wells in Tanzania.

"The appreciation I now have — and it hasn't diminished since I've been back — about water, and even about water issues in my own community, has changed," Roche said. "It's something I've been trying not to take for granted."

Sinnwell said that's a common reaction.

"It changes how I read the paper, what I choose to read in the paper and how I watch the news," she said.

In Tanzania, the project partnered with the Society of the Divine Savior — known as the Salvatorians — in Milwaukee, who already had a channel developed to get money to Tanzania. The money allows a Tanzanian organization, Safe Water for Life and Dignity, to install or repair wells. Project committee members have been to Tanzania to see the work, Goedken said, but work teams are not needed.

Without a proper well, villages rely on women and girls hauling unsafe water from a river or they take water from an open pit, ripe for contamination.

Committee member Brian Gilligan speaks in an award-winning Sister Water Project video about visiting Tanzania and seeing a little girl carrying water for her family. On a return trip two years later, she was wearing school clothes — the well freed her from the chore and allowed her to attend school for the first time, changing her life in a second way.

Now, as the congregation prepares for its next Chapter meeting, the committee is doing strategic planning for the future — which is how Roche got involved.

"Now we have to face, what do we do for the future," Sinnwell said. "Is this sustainable, what kind of structures do we leave in place? We've realized we also need to educate the community so that our sisters and associates can make the best decisions."

[Dan Stockman is national correspondent for Global Sisters Report. Follow him on Twitter @DanStockman or on Facebook.]

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry-environment/meeting-peoples-need-clean-water-changes-sisters-lives-too-55848>

February 12, 2019

Indigenous researchers plant seeds of hope for health and climate

By Kim Anderson
The Conversation

As we learn more about climate change, this knowledge can be paralyzing, [especially for young people](#) who are contemplating life pathways.

Indigenous [land-based learning](#) offers an avenue for hope, embedded in action. This approach has [been taken up in recent years](#) by a number of [post-secondary institutions in Canada](#) and [internationally](#).

This is the focus of our work — as mixed ancestry (Hannah), Anishinaabe (Brittany) and Metis (Kim) scholars at the University of Guelph in Ontario. According to Indigenous ways of knowing, [we are only as healthy as our environments](#). And so our research addresses sustainable food practices that [feed the well-being](#) of “all our relations:” human, land, spirit.

Using food as a starting point for action, we have launched a community-based research program — to promote conversations and opportunities across geographic and social spaces that [forge and rekindle relationships focused on traditional foodways](#).

This work starts with relationships, and it involves labour — both of which are critical to [Indigenous pedagogy](#). With Indigenous community partners, we engage social science, nutrition and engineering students in hands-on work in Indigenous food and medicine gardens and in [manomin \(wild rice\) fields](#).

This enables us to focus on time-honoured relationships in our homelands and university lands while preparing for the future.

‘Green shoots that grow after a fire’

The relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the land encourages practices and traditions that perpetuate healthy families and communities. On- and off-reserve, momentum is building and [communities want to be involved in building](#) opportunities for [learning and social interactions around food](#).

In collaboration with other Indigenous faculty, students and a growing urban network, we have been working to expand gardens in the wider [Grand River Territory](#) and at the University of Guelph — on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people and the treaty lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We work together to strengthen land-based relationships and local food sovereignty.

In an effort to address community needs in southwestern Ontario, our on-going research is designed to engage a diverse group of partners, collaborators and knowledge users. Garden sites have been established with the assistance of the local Indigenous community at the [University of Guelph Arboretum](#) — to address food access and knowledge barriers and [explore innovative land-based education and practices](#).

Since the spring of 2018, a group of committed community members, faculty and students have planted and nurtured edible and medicinal plants. The gardens are known collectively as *Wisahkotewinowak*, which means “green shoots that grow after a fire.”

The garden brings together community agencies such as: the [Grand River Métis Council](#), [White Owl Native Ancestry Association](#) and [Global Youth Volunteer Network](#). Elder-led workshops on medicinal plants, and preservation methods have taken place throughout the four seasons.

This project has strengthened inter-generational and inter-regional relationships. Using food as a starting point, conversations and opportunities for sharing allow people to share their knowledge and to forge relationships with the land and each other.

Histories of loss offer clues for regrowth

In some cases, however, environmental change has limited the ability of Elders to pass on traditional knowledge through hands-on activities such as planting and harvesting foods.

Such is the case at Dalles 38C Indian Reserve from which Brittany's Anishinaabe ancestors originate. [Upstream](#) and [downstream dams](#) control the flows into and out of the [Winnipeg River](#) which runs through the reserve.

Water depths within manomin (wild rice) habitats have been altered by hydroelectric development and continue to be subject to fluctuations during the growing season that do not resemble the natural patterns to which manomin adapted.

Discharges from upstream sources have also affected sediment and water quality. These sources include the community of Kenora and a pulp and paper mill which ceased operation in the 2000s.

Researchers at the University of Guelph have partnered with the Economic Development Committee at Dalles 38C Indian Reserve to determine which factors are limiting the growth of manomin and to develop management strategies to control these factors.

The traditional knowledge of Elders — shared through interviews and river tours — aids in understanding the historical relationship between water fluctuations, urban discharge and the growth of manomin.

By combining traditional knowledge of manomin with more recent observations about riverine change, youth involved in the research can begin to understand that histories of loss may, indeed, provide clues for regrowth. This changed lens results in a future-oriented view of the Winnipeg River that challenges the nature and duration of settler-industrial landscapes.

Elder knowledge allows youth to envision compromised fields as productive Anishinaabe spaces.

All our Relations

University research and teaching through projects like the *Wisaktowinowak* gardens and the [manomin/wild rice project](#) create new opportunities for youth and Elders to interact, both on campus — by planting seeds — and in Anishinaabe homelands through the revival of traditional harvesting.

It's the land that brings us together, the land that teaches relationship-based ways of knowing about the natural world and its food systems.

And with the increasing uptake of post-secondary land-based education, we may just change the way upcoming generations envision our environment and shape the future that unfolds on it.

<http://theconversation.com/indigenous-researchers-plant-seeds-of-hope-for-health-and-climate-106217>

February 13, 2019

Indigenous groups unite in call for Murray-Darling royal commission

By Peter Hannam
Sydney Morning Herald

Only a federal royal commission with "real teeth" can uncover the corruption and mismanagement that is killing the nation's biggest river system, the Murray-Darling Basin, leading Indigenous groups say.

The demand was a centrepiece of issues raised by hundreds of water activists who gathered in Canberra on Wednesday, including some who staged a protest in the Marble Foyer of Parliament House.

Protest against fracking and Indigenous issues in the foyer at Parliament House on Wednesday. *Credit: Dominic Lorrimer*

"The federal royal commission must have real teeth," Michael Anderson, acting chair of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations, said. "It's got to have the power to recommend prosecutions."

The call, which dovetailed with the Greens' plan to introduce a bill for a royal commission in the Senate, is aimed at breaking up "an incestuous relationship between the National Party and farmers" that had led to the unsustainable over-allocation of water extraction from the rivers, Mr Anderson said.

A separate South Australian royal commission into the basin, [which released its final report last month, identified "gross negligence" and maladministration of the \\$13 billion plan](#) to restore rivers' health. It recommended having two Aboriginal representatives on the board of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and a "meaningful consultation" over "cultural flows".

Indigenous groups say their interest, not least in "cultural water" rights, has largely been neglected in the design and implementation of the basin's recovery efforts.

"First Nations are the original custodians of our iconic inland rivers. For 60,000 years our knowledge and management maintained a sustainable, productive ecosystem," Rene Woods, chair of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, said.

"Now, catastrophic fish deaths, toxic blue-green algal blooms and unsafe drinking water are causing distress and hurting our communities."

The third group joining the royal commission call is the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations.

The third and possibly largest of three big fish kills on the Darling River at Menindee, in a photo taken on January 29. *Credit: Graeme McCrabb*

'Urgent action' needed

"We know we have to take urgent action to save our river system, which is in crisis," Sarah Hanson-Young, Greens environment spokeswoman, said.

"Something is very, very rotten: how on earth can we be spending \$13 billion dollars and yet we've got a dead river system," Senator Hanson-Young said. "[It's because of] corruption, corporate cotton and climate change."

Only a royal commission "can get to the bottom of it", she said.

Protestors against fracking in the marble foyer of Parliament House in Canberra. *Credit: Alex Ellinghausen*

The *Herald* sought comment from David Littleproud, federal agriculture minister.

Labor's water spokesman, Tony Burke, said his party would, for now, focus on its own bill aimed at repealing the cap that limits water buybacks in the basin to 1500 billion litres.

"We will soon have four extensive pieces of analysis in to the Murray Darling Basin – the Productivity Commission review, the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Royal Commission, the Academy of Sciences review in to the fish kills and the review commissioned by [Mr Littleproud]," Mr Burke said.

"There may be a point where Labor supports a further royal commission into this area but right now we are about to have four significant sets of recommendations in front of us and the rivers need action to be taken urgently."

Mr Anderson noted Australia is a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, launched at the United Nations' Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 – a point also highlighted in the SA royal commission's report.

Despite that commitment, federal agencies such as the Commonwealth Water Holder "had failed to engage with First Nations peoples sufficiently", Mr Anderson said. Indigenous people were required to give "their full prior informed consent with respect to biodiversity and planning for ecosystems in the Murray-Darling Basin", he said.

February 18, 2019

Panama: Catholic sister considers dam a violation of indigenous people's right to religion

By Tracy L. Barnett
Global Sisters Report

A set of mysterious petroglyphs lie at the heart of the indigenous Ngäbe-Buglé religion and written language — and those petroglyphs now lie at the bottom of a stagnant, foul-smelling reservoir.

The flooding caused by the Barro Blanco hydroelectric project nearly three years ago constitutes an ongoing violation of their religious and cultural rights, say Ngäbe-Buglé leaders, in addition to causing widespread damage to orchards, farmland and fishing that the communities depended on for food and livelihood. Sr. Edia "Tita" López of the Sisters of Mercy agrees.

López has accompanied this indigenous group in its struggle for more than a decade, since before the dam was built. She moved to the *comarca*, or Ngäbe-Buglé territory, in 2010 to join them in their struggle; she was there a year later when construction on the dam began. She was there, too, when thousands of Ngäbe dam opponents marched in the streets in a series of protests that culminated with protester deaths and lasting injuries. And she continued to support the communities in May of 2016, when the company began to fill the reservoir behind the dam, leading to flooding of the communities and weeks of significant and sometimes violent protests.

She watched with dismay as the Panamanian government pushed the dam project through, flooding Kiad and two other riverside communities, their cemetery and ceremonial site included, while causing springs to dry up and other environmental effects. Global Sisters Report chronicled the damage caused by the dam and the community's opposition to it in a [series of articles](#) in 2017.

Now, in the context of an investigation by an accountability mechanism of the United Nations Development Program, the affected communities are calling on the agency to help rectify the situation. "I have seen that the human rights of the population of the Ngäbe-Buglé people in this case have in no way been respected," said López in a recent interview. "For example, everything about the right to free, prior and informed consent has been totally violated by the project. I think they [Panamanian government authorities] never gave the correct or the complete and objective information to them in a way that people could understand what it was about, and the repercussions and the scope of the project. There was no intention to consult them, I think. How terrible, because the decision was already made."

López's words echo those found in the 40-page investigation of the Social and Environmental Compliance Unit (SECU), an accountability mechanism established to monitor the activities of

the United Nations Development Program. While the UNDP was not a direct investor in the dam itself, it did coordinate a series of dialogues aimed at finding a resolution to what was already by then a decade-long battle against the dam.

SECU found that the development agency's participation in the roundtable dialogs, and particularly, in the technical roundtables that followed was problematic in several regards. The team spent a year combing through public records and media reports (including GSR's) and interviewing all involved parties, releasing their findings in August 2018. UNDP's participation was particularly problematic, the report stated, given "red flags" raised on two previous occasions by other U.N. investigations.

A UNDP technical investigation in 2013 revealed major flaws in the environmental impact study. A second study by James Anaya, then the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues, warned of irregularities in the process and a failure to properly consult with the Ngäbe people. Anaya warned that "the lands of the Ngäbe people should not be flooded or adversely affected in any way without the prior agreement of the representative authorities of that people." The "representative authorities" means the Ngäbe-Buglé congress, which to this day has not approved the dam.

The agency did not follow its own protocols in ways that were also problematic, [according to the report](#). Among other issues, the UNDP's Panamanian representative did not meet UNDP requirements to apply the agency's environmental and social screening procedures. Use of those procedures would likely have revealed the probability of "adverse impacts on enjoyment of human rights;" risk of violence; and "impacts to indigenous culture, i.e., it was clear the dialogue could lead to an agreement that would adversely impact the petroglyphs and other forms of affected community culture."

UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner released his decision regarding the project on Feb. 4, calling the SECU investigation a "rich source of information and learning about a number of interventions in this project and how, in view of the lessons learned, we might approach similar interventions in the future."

It did not, however, mention interventions to rectify the situation plaguing the residents of Kiad who, in addition to losing their ceremonial site, have lost their principal water source and their livelihood. Fruit orchards, coffee and cacao plantations and their herbal pharmacopeia were also flooded. In addition, the hydroelectric dam company drained the river last year during maintenance, causing a massive fish kill, and now the communities' main protein source has been virtually eliminated.

The impacts to the community are felt not only by those who live there, but by the Ngäbe-Buglé nation at large. Ancestral cemeteries now under water and the dams "have permanently affected the set of sacred petroglyphs where the communities of the entire region gathered annually to pay tribute to the Cacique Tabasará, as well as a place of healing," wrote Goejet Miranda, president of the M10 movement representing the affected communities, in the group's letter to Steiner on Jan. 9, as they awaited his response to the SECU report. (M10 refers to April 10, "*Movimiento 10 de Abril.*")

Miranda was referring to the mythical warrior-leader revered in their traditions, whose name is still carried by what is left of their Tabasará River. "This reservoir is depriving [the Ngäbe-Buglé people] of the exercise of their religious ceremonial worldview in a very important way, not only for the affected communities but for the entire Ngäbe Buglé nation," the letter went on to say.

"There is freedom of worship in this nation and the company through its reservoir has violated this right, as well as the government that has allowed it, have violated the law and damaged the sacred petroglyphs, apart from making them inaccessible through its reservoir and tons of sediment that cover it. This in itself constitutes an unforgivable violation of Human Rights, as well as an ethnocide where a culture is killed, its sacred places are destroyed along with their religious culture." (The residents had not received a response as of Feb. 13.)

About 100 people attended this year's annual ceremony honoring Cacique Tabasará — a fraction of the numbers who used to come from all over the Ngäbe territories for the celebration — and the three-day proceedings were beset with hardships due to the lack of water, said Weni Bagama, Kiad resident, M10 leader and one of the event organizers.

"It has become extremely difficult to organize events now due to the fact that our spring is drying up, and we no longer have our river," said Bagama, who continues to travel to Panama City to knock on doors and pursue legal options to support their struggle.

In December, she traveled with two other indigenous activists to Washington, D.C., seeking out the offices of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to follow up on a [hearing](#) two years ago and a precautionary measure that have yet to bear results. She located her community's file in the building's vast maze of offices, as well as a person familiar with the process, who advised her on the next steps to reactivate that case.

With regard to the specific concern about religious freedom, López cited Article 11 of the [U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), which states that they "have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs." The declaration adds that "States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs."

López, who is Panamanian, reflected upon the role of religion and culture in indigenous communities forming the collective memory of a people. "Religious expressions are only one of their rights as an indigenous people, but that allows them to live in the middle of the political struggle for their natural assets," she said. "Subjected to the political — in the specific case of Barro Blanco, an economic power that subjects and excludes them — our people resist, thanks to their cultural, religious specificity."

Indeed, she added, religion and culture have become the foundation of indigenous struggles to maintain their territories and ways of life. "Those struggles that are in fact cultural and religious struggles, and at the same time expressions of the vitality of their cultures," said López, and "are what allows them to survive this system that excludes and marginalizes them."

[Tracy L. Barnett is an independent writer, editor and photographer specializing in environmental issues, indigenous rights and sustainable travel.]

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/environment-equality/panama-catholic-sister-considers-dam-violation-indigenous-peoples-right>

February 20, 2019

Pipeline struggle reveals value of community to religious congregation

By Dennis Sadowski, Catholic News Service
Global Sisters Report

For the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to hear the order's religious freedom claims in a legal challenge to a natural gas pipeline through their land in Pennsylvania came as no real surprise.

"But we needed to see it through and that's what we did," said Sr. Janet McCann, a member of the Adorers' leadership team in St. Louis.

Without comment, the Supreme Court announced Feb. 19 that it had declined the congregation's petition for a hearing.

The Adorers' argument centered on their rights under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or RFRA. They maintained that allowing construction of the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline and its use would be contrary to their 2005 Land Ethic, which holds that all of creation is sacred and that it must be protected from desecration.

McCann said despite the court's decision her congregation realized the 19-month ordeal had given it ample opportunity for "continuing to educate ourselves and educating other people and heightening the awareness of what is happening with our earth."

"Also we learned the process of how to stand up and speak out to big, powerful multibillion-dollar corporations," she told Catholic News Service Feb. 20. "We're hoping that our willingness to kind of stumble through all of this will give some encouragement to other individuals, other communities or other entities to do the same."

The Adorers' opposition to the 42-inch transmission line operated by Oklahoma-based Williams began in July 2017. It found them becoming allies with other faith-based and grass-roots activists, namely Lancaster Against Pipelines, which continues to hold vigils and nonviolent protests along parts of the 183-mile pipeline route.

Early on, the sisters allowed Lancaster Against Pipelines to construct a symbolic chapel on their property adjacent to the project's route.

In their petition to the court, the sisters asked the justices to determine how widely government agencies must regard claims under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and whether a lower court's review of an agency's order satisfies the religious freedom guarantees under the law.

Attorney Dwight Yoder, who filed the Adorers' case, credited the sisters for their prayerful presence as their appeals wound through the court system.

He also predicted that the Supreme Court's decision will have ramifications for other faith-based communities and organizations as they consider legal action based on religious freedom claims.

"This is a violation that's going to continue indefinitely," Yoder told CNS from his office in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. "Here are sisters that have committed their lives to living their faith and part of that is to care for the earth and use their own land in a way that is critical to their faith.

"To have a multibillion-dollar private company to force its way onto your own property and use the federal government to do so seems counter to the basic principles that the country stands for," he said. "The sisters are grieving that they're going to have the pipeline on their land."

Yoder is unsure if any other legal avenues remain for the sisters to explore. He said the option for the Adorers to seek monetary damages for the pipeline's construction seemed to have been left open by the federal court.

"I'm not sure it's something we can pursue," he said, "but we're going to examine it."

Despite the denial, McCann said the effort had been "God-led."

"We've learned about this whole thing, what religious women are learning and relearning, is what it means to live the common life, what it means to live in community, especially these days when our world seems to be so at odds with each other," she told CNS.

"Perhaps that's a call for all religious women or communities like Lancaster Against Pipelines, all of us, how we can use that gift of community."

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/pipeline-struggle-reveals-value-community-religious-congregation-55894>

February 27, 2019

Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Environmental Justice

By Rachel Kirk and Meredith Smith
Earth Institute

[Hussein Rashid](#) is a theologian, Columbia University graduate, adjunct professor of religion at the New School, and founder of Islamicate, a consultancy based in NYC. Professor Rashid

brings his background in religion and culture to affect positive change in the world. His work includes exploring theology, the interaction between culture and religion, and the role of the arts in conflict mediation. In this interview with Rachel Kirk and Meredith Smith, he talks about his own religious life and the challenges and possibilities he sees in environmental justice work today.

Two years ago, Rashid came together with two colleagues — Karenni Gore, who is the director for the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, and Burt Visotzky, the Milstein Chair for Interreligious Dialogue at Jewish Theological Seminary — for an interfaith reading group around a Papal encyclical, [Laudato Si'](#), which called for environmental stewardship from a Catholic perspective. They reflected on where the Catholic Church was putting stakes in the ground, and on what their own faith traditions teach about environmental care and stewardship, and shared their thoughts in [a liturgy](#) about the importance of water, which was published on several websites. Rashid has since gotten increasingly involved in [environmental justice](#), speaking and working with Alliance for Fair Food, on World Water Day, and other initiatives.

How did Pope Francis' framing lead into your work addressing the environment?

A lot of what Pope Francis was doing in his work was talking about the questions of capitalism: how capitalism is extractive, how when we look at what's happening to the environment, the people who are extracting the most are also insulating themselves from the impacts of climate change. And the people being taken from are not only being hit from having their resources extracted from them but are also at the forefront of feeling the results of climate change. Pope Francis makes a very strong argument about the relationship between capitalism, environmental damage, and the environmental neglect, and who suffers as a result of that.

The encyclical allowed me to think about this more systematically, personally. A few weeks ago, I was on a panel with the Fair Food Alliance of Immokalee workers and thinking about questions like: What does it mean to get our food from farm workers who are abused and mistreated? Is that ethical food? Where does ethical food come from? A couple of years ago, I decided to give up meat for very similar reasons. Not only was it extractive environmentally, it was also very abusive. If we think about the fact that we can buy a pound of chicken for a dollar but realize that you can't buy the food that was used to raise that chicken for a dollar, then you have to think about the workers who are involved with that. From an animal perspective, a workers' perspective, and a consumer's perspective, there's something deadening about not being able to say people are able to live off the fact that I'm buying this meat.

At the end of our formal period together for our *Laudato Si'* reading group, on World Water Day, we released a liturgy over several sites about care for water, to be picked up by water resource groups as a way to ground this. Part of the thinking was (mostly from the Abrahamic traditions, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) that with a meal you offer a prayer of thanks and acknowledge God's bounty, generosity, and grace. If you're thinking about being thankful for water, it makes you think about who doesn't get to be thankful for water. Thankfulness should generate a feeling of generosity and awareness, not self-satisfaction. That was some of the thinking that went behind that liturgy.

How do you think about local aspects of this versus global connections?

For me, it was important to do something that was really localized and where we could see a direct impact. It feels trite but think globally, act locally. We recognize that questions of water or water access, water shortage, and potable water are going to continue to be a global issue. That question of access is only going to be exacerbated as climate change continues. But you can't affect change globally unless you get buy-in from the big players. As we saw, it's not happening at Davos. The way to affect change is thinking about the very particular local ways to change and how that can be transferred to other locations. Having worked with the Fair Food Alliance, I knew that this started with tomato growers in Florida but understood the ways in which it's impacting dairy farmers in Vermont, or citrus producers in the South. Once you make a change in one way, people recognize the ways in which it can be emulated or adapted to their needs.

With the Alliance for Fair Food, you were exploring the connection between faith and the advancement of human rights. Can you tell us about the different people involved in this work and who you're trying to have an impact on?

The Fair Food Alliance panel was about workers coming together to say we can't work in conditions where there's physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and low wages. I realized that in that space, what they're asking for is their dignity. This is not me speaking, I'm trying to reiterate what they were interested in and what they were fighting for. That space of human dignity is what I'm interested in — because what is the point of getting organic tomatoes if people were beaten in the process of getting those organic tomatoes? Where is the human element of this? When you start saying 'People aren't worth anything,' how can anything else be worth anything? To listen to their stories and to reflect on what does that mean ethically from a Muslim tradition I think is where my interests are right now.

Based on either your liturgy work or the panel from the Fair Food Alliance, what solutions are being put forth?

A lot of what came forward was from the workers themselves. They're the ones who started organizing. They had these question of abuse, harassment, unfair pay, and they organized, and they went to corporations because corporations tended to be the largest buyers. They said 'Okay, if you pay a penny more for a pound of tomatoes, in terms of your overall cost, it's negligible. But if we take that penny and we put it towards funding a worker's rights initiative where we can take complaints, then we can't be fired, and all your growers have to sign to these tenets of fair work.' Taco Bell was one of the first companies to sign onto this and they've now gotten [a whole lot of the other brands](#) to sign off on this. Now they're dealing with millions of dollars every year coming in to defend workers' rights, which is now being replicated by other food workers' industries. This is organizing in its most basically classic sense. It was recognizing that the people have the power. My role was simply to say this is human dignity, this is what it means to have human agency, and thinking about it through my lens as a Muslim thinker and believer.

What are the shorter- and longer-term impacts that you're hoping to have?

There are personal things that we can do but what we're looking at is deeper structural issues. The fact is that if 100 people went vegetarian today, it's not going to do anything for our carbon emissions, for our abuse of animals, for the poor treatment of workers. At the same time, it's an ethical and political act for me in that it allows me the space to talk about this because we need to think about systematic interventions. We're not just consuming the meat. We're consuming labor. If we were to pay for what all of this is actually worth, we wouldn't be eating this. But we can't have that conversation until we're willing to say, "I'm not eating meat". It's very much a theological question if God is meant to be the giver and the sustainer. What does it mean when we take more than what we are given? In Muslim traditions, we talk about this idea of the nafs, which is translated as soul or ego, which is really about our base or animal instincts. We want to eat as much as we can because that's what our animal selves want us to do. And part of it is saying no to ourselves. Our teachings systematically tell us that this system of consumption is not for us. And yet we constantly find that it's so easy for us to fall back into that trap.

You are bringing interfaith communities together. Are there any efforts to bring people with less faith-based backgrounds in?

I'm coming at this from a particular lens as a Shia Muslim. My Jewish colleagues, my Presbyterian colleagues, my Baptist colleagues will come at it from a different perspective. There's a surprising amount of sympathetic thought, but there's also gaps. And how do we fill those gaps? I would imagine the same thing is true were we to bring in Hindu thinkers and Jain thinkers and Sikh thinkers and non-faith thinkers. The workers' rights initiative was not a faith-based initiative. It was a workers' rights initiative. I go to these spaces as a person of faith but it's not definitionally about faith. What we're thinking about are bigger issues but the lens that I'm coming at it is through faith.

Do you have any practical tips or any lessons that you've learned from your experiences?

It's only been about two years since I've been thinking about this systematically. In working within faith communities, a lot of it has been thinking about what do we say when we're offered food or water, and what is the intentionality? How do we think beyond formula into thinking about what does it mean to thank God for what we have been given? Have we taken more than what we need and how do we engage with that? I think even just that helps to start shifting the thinking because it is so easy to fall into a consumptive model of living. And maybe I don't want to give up my steak dinner, but I'm really called to renewable energy. That's great. It's not possible for everybody to do everything, so what is it that people are called to? We need to think about all of this together, but I think the first thing that is important for me is creating that perception shift.

If you were just passing someone on the street who might not know what environmental justice is but wants to do something to care for the planet, what advice would you give this person?

I hear people say "The system is broken. What can I do?" And I think the first thing is recognizing that the system is not broken, it's functioning exactly as it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be breaking us and it's doing a really good job at it. I think that the system has

broken us so much that we don't even recognize the value that we have as human beings in the first place. For me, understanding how to take care of the Earth begins with understanding how to take care of ourselves. We as human beings have value and as a result of that value, we have a responsibility to each other and the place in which we live.

Okay, one more question. What item would you suggest for a reading list on environmental justice?

I would recommend [Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet](#), by Ibrahim Abdul-Matin. It's a great approach to understanding environmentalism through an Islamic lens. It draws from scripture and research and interviews with Muslim Americans. Plus, it's inspirational and a great read for anyone, of all faiths, with interest in the environment, especially today.

<https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2019/02/27/faith-environmental-justice-rashid/>

March 2019

Remembering Co-Founder Jim Mulligan

Earth Ministry

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Earth Ministry co-founder Rev. Jim Mulligan. Jim was a wise and loving person who brought his commitment, experience, and energy to Earth Ministry. His care for God's creation and the human and natural communities of our common home set the standard for our mission and programs.

Jim and his wife Ruth have long been the heart of Earth Ministry and we will miss Jim greatly. We invite all of you to join the Earth Ministry community for a celebration of Jim's life at 1pm on Saturday, March 9 at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle. Contributions in his honor can be made to [Earth Ministry's Jim Mulligan Memorial Fund](#).

JAMES THOMAS MULLIGAN

The Reverend James Mulligan, 76, passed away quickly and peacefully early Thursday morning, February 14, following eight years living with Alzheimer's. He was a gentle man, with a loving, helping heart, and a willingness to take unassuming leadership roles when and where needed, often behind the scene, and always with a great sense of humor.

Jim and his twin brother, Timothy, were born November 17, 1942, to Frank and Marjorie Mulligan, in Los Angeles, California. His family moved to Marietta, Georgia, where he graduated from Marietta High School, and Hampden-Sydney College, Virginia. He earned his MDiv to become a Presbyterian minister from Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, in 1968. With acceptance by Seattle Presbytery, Jim moved to Seattle in 1971 to become Pastoral

Counselor at Presbyterian Counseling Service, (now Samaritan Center). He became an Approved Supervisor in the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists in 1979. Jim was recognized as an exceptional Family Therapist and Supervisor, serving for twenty-five years.

In June 1981, Jim married his loving wife of 38 years, Ruth Voskuyl Ferguson, and stepped into the role of engaged stepfather to Leslie, 14, and Karrie, 13.

Following a wilderness river canoe trip in northern British Columbia, Jim and Ruth were inspired to embark in a new direction. In 1992 they co-founded Earth Ministry, an ecumenical religious environmental non-profit, with Carla Berkedal Pryne, Episcopal priest. By 1996, Jim had moved to full-time involvement, becoming Executive Director. Jim served as a visionary leader for seven years, followed by eight years as devoted editor of the mini-journal, "Earth Letter".

Jim relished his time spent in nature at their beloved cabin on Harstine Island. He was an avid photographer of nature (especially birds) and family activities. The last six years of his life, he enjoyed participating actively in the dementia-friendly activities of the "Momentia" community (momentiaseattle.com). Jim was appreciated for his warm smile, big hugs, great sense of humor, and beautiful singing voice.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; brother, Tim (Kyle); stepdaughters Leslie David (Chris), and Karrie Sutkus (Don); and grandchildren Justin, Kaitlyn, Heather, and Erika.

In lieu of flowers, contributions in Jim's honor can be made to [Earth Ministry's Jim Mulligan Memorial Fund](#). A memorial service and reception will be held on Saturday, March 9, Saint Mark's Cathedral, 1:00pm. Jim's online Guestbook is at www.Legacy.com.

<https://earthministry.org/remembering-earth-ministry-co-founder-jim-mulligan/>

March 1, 2019

Faith community joins Florida congressman in opposing offshore drilling

By Dennis Sadowski, Catholic News Service Environment
National Catholic Reporter

Washington — Rep. Francis Rooney, a former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, cautioned that offshore drilling for oil in Florida's coastal waters would endanger the state's tourism-based economy should a major spill occur.

The Republican congressman from Florida also said during a midday roundtable discussion sponsored by the National Religious Partnership for the Environment on Capitol Hill Feb. 27 that steps must be taken to reduce dependence on fossil fuels because their continued use damages the environment and contributes to climate change.

"Offshore drilling is a real problem for people in Florida, particularly the west coast. The east coast not so much because the Gulf Stream kind of makes it impossible to do much of it," Rooney said.

"But where we are (along Florida's southwest coast) ... we are at severe risk to our economy should there be a spill or should there be infrastructure put in place to ensure the support of massive offshore drilling operations, because when you have a lot of wells, you have pipelines," Rooney said.

The hourlong program, which occurred in two segments, focused on how the faith community can respond to a plan introduced 13 months ago by President Donald Trump's administration to open nearly all U.S. coastal waters to oil and natural gas drilling. Former Florida Gov. Rick Scott, now a Republican senator in Congress, was able to secure an exemption from drilling along the state's unspoiled coasts.

Rooney has long expressed concern for the impact of climate change around the world, especially through rising sea levels and more powerful storms because of warmer ocean waters. He was one of seven members of Congress — and the only Republican — to recently introduce the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act.

The legislation has several components. Most notably, it introduces a carbon fee of \$15 per ton of emissions starting in 2019. The fee — some have called it a tax — would rise by \$10 per ton a year until being capped at \$100 per ton. All fees collected would be placed into a carbon dividend trust fund for distribution to U.S. households.

Advocates for the bill, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Climate Covenant, stress that it offers a market-based solution to reduce carbon pollution from the use of coal, oil and natural gas. It's based on the idea that carbon emissions would decline as consumers, industry and energy companies seek cleaner, cheaper energy options.

An analysis published Feb. 27 by First Street Foundation estimated property value losses from coastal flooding in 17 states, from Maine to Mississippi, at nearly \$16 billion from 2005 to 2017. Florida had the greatest loss in relative home values at \$5.4 billion, according to the Brooklyn, New York-based foundation, which researches the risks associated with sea-level rise and flooding.

Each of the three other participants in the program on the Hill also expressed concern about offshore drilling and the importance of raising the faith community's voice to influence Congress as well as average Americans to actively address climate change.

The Rev. Russell Meyer, a Lutheran minister representing the Florida Council of Churches, joined the first session alongside Rooney. He said the council is working to help people of faith understand the need to "transition off of fossil fuels altogether."

The council is working to connect the impact of climate change and poverty as issues that people of faith must address to build a just economy where all people can benefit, Meyer said.

"We're trying to cast a vision of what a blue-green economy looks like, one that respects water, one that builds on renewable energy, one that actually generates jobs," he said.

Meyer also cited Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" as an important document for people of all faiths to study and understand the connectedness of all life on earth.

In the second discussion, the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, director of the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness in Washington, said the Presbyterian Church (USA) has formally addressed environmental concerns since 1981.

The church also has emphasized that climate change already is affecting the poorest people around the world and that Christians are responsible for caring for all of God's creation, he said.

Penny Hooper, leadership council chair for North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light, a program of the North Carolina Council of Churches, explained how climate change has contributed to more intense hurricanes in her state and elsewhere including southeast Texas and Puerto Rico, where record flooding has been recorded.

She said her husband's livelihood as a fisherman in the eastern part of the state has seen negative effects from rising seas and warming waters. She said new offshore drilling would add to the consequences he and others face.

Hooper also read a statement from the Rev. Jennifer Copeland, executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches, that opposed drilling in North Carolina coastal waters because of its negative impact on thousands of people dependent on fishing and tourism for their livelihood.

"Opening North Carolina's coast to offshore oil and gas drilling will threaten the health and well-being of our coastal communities and the worldwide environment," Copeland's statement said. "Offshore drilling poses a dire and immediate threat to the coastlands and inland estuaries, marshes and waterways of the coast of North Carolina and to the ecosystems of birds, shrimp, oysters, fish and other life forms."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/faith-community-joins-florida-congressman-opposing-offshore-drilling>

March 7, 2019

God and the earth: Evangelical take on climate change

By Shay Meinecke
Deutsche Welle

Conservative Christians have long opposed climate science, saying human induced warming goes against God's omnipotence. Opinions divide on whether that thinking might slowly be changing.

When Reverend Mitchell Hescoc organized an [environmental stewardship](#) conference for evangelical Christians in Missouri in 2014, only five people showed up. This past September, he said, the same conference attracted 500 attendees.

"We're seeing a remarkable changing of the times," Hescoc told DW, adding that although many evangelicals are still [dismissive of global warming](#), "a growing number are "getting behind climate science."

Hescoc is also president and CEO of the [Evangelical Environment Network](#) (EEN), one of the largest evangelical groups in the US. Ten years ago, it had some 25,000 members, now it comprises "4 million pro-life Christians."

For more than two decades, the EEN has been educating members to care for everything it believes to have been created by God. One of its main missions has been convincing evangelicals to recognize climate change as something that's increasingly [impacting their own lives](#).

"Climate change isn't just about polar bears. It's about our children's health. It's about our life now and in the future," Hescoc said, adding that it poses several risks in the US.

Apart from the increased frequency of [extreme weather events](#), the Washington D.C.-based Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says rising temperatures in the Midwest and eastern US have caused a rapid increase in the population of [ticks that can transmit Lyme disease](#).

In addition, findings from the University of Washington in Seattle suggest corn production could fall by around 50 percent by the end of the century if [greenhouse gas emissions](#) remain unchecked; and the American Lung Association says higher levels of CO2 are also contributing to lung disease and respiratory problems.

Why climate policy hinges on evangelical support

According to a [2015 Pew Research poll](#), more than a quarter of the US population identifies as evangelical or born-again Christian, people who generally interpret the bible literally and tend to be very socially conservative. Largely white and transdenominational, they're much more likely to be Republican than Democrat.

A different Pew poll in 2016 found that 81 percent of evangelicals and born-again Christians voted for President Donald Trump. Though, in large part, that trend could be attributed to his stance on abortion and gun control, he also used his campaign to tap into a long tradition of Republican antipathy to [environmental issues](#).

And since taking up office, he has pulled the US out of the [Paris Climate Agreement](#), which aims to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels.

This January, however, [an NPR/PBS/Marist survey](#) found only 66 percent of white evangelicals now approve of Trump's presidency, down from a 73 percent rating in December.

The drop in support comes after the longest partial government shutdown in US history, the separation of migrant families at the US-Mexican border, and as Trump continues to deny global warming even though a [clear majority of Republicans](#) currently acknowledge it is happening.

At the end of last year, the president went on record saying he didn't believe his own government's findings on the potential economic impacts of unchecked emissions.

Are opinions shifting?

Changing evangelicals' minds, Hescoc says, could have a significant impact on advancing environment-friendly climate policies. Though he concedes they aren't about to jump to the Democratic Party, he believes they are now more likely to pressure their Republican representatives to adopt a more forward approach to the problem.

Katharine Hayhoe, an evangelical, atmospheric scientist and political science professor at [Texas Tech University](#) in Lubbock, also says she sees attitudes changing. She says this could have something to do with certain solutions proving business-friendly.

"There's been a massive expansion of clean energy across the middle of the country. We have 30,000 jobs in Texas with solar energy," she said.

"Very conservative farmers, who would rather cut off their arms than let the government impose regulations on carbon emissions, now have wind turbines on their land. And a check arrives in the mail. So they're like, 'oh, ok, there's no problem with that.'"

But David Konisky, associate professor at the [School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University](#), says he sees no sign of evangelicals budging on climate policy. On the contrary.

"My analysis of US Gallup public opinion polls does not indicate any widespread 'greening of Christianity' among evangelical Protestants or other Christian denominations," he said in an interview with DW.

"Over the time period I studied (around 2000-2015), there is evidence of declining levels of environmental concern."

The beliefs behind climate change denial

This dismissal of climate science could be explained in a number of ways, says Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, National Organizer and Spokesperson for [Young Evangelicals for Climate Action](#) (YECA), a group that has been educating younger people on how just much the Bible talks about caring for the environment.

While some see global warming as part of God's plan or even as a sign of the end of the world, as prophesied in the book of Revelation, others point to a passage in the book of Genesis that says humans should have "dominion" over the earth.

The interpretation of "dominion" has historically divided Christians into those who interpret it as the need for God's followers to take responsible stewardship of Earth, and those who understand it as humans having absolute command over all things on the planet.

Evangelicals have also contributed to the growing partisan divide in the US in recent decades, Meyaard-Schaap explained, and have historically opposed climate science out of a fear of liberal government solutions.

"Climate change has effectively been polarized. Many Christians in the US have come to the conclusion that supporting climate action must also mean supporting other liberal and socially economic positions," he said, in reference to issues such as abortion rights and same sex marriage.

"This would mean betraying their values and turning their backs on their communities."

<https://www.dw.com/en/god-and-the-earth-evangelical-take-on-climate-change/a-47781433>

March 14, 2019

YDS climate panel pushes past denial and despair

Yale Divinity School

Hope does not come easy or cheap, as YDS Professor Clifton Granby put it, in a time when climate change is advancing and human society seems unable to respond.

But while not flinching from the enormity of the challenge—the greatest humans have ever faced, in the words of panel member Mary Evelyn Tucker—a YDS public forum in Atlanta on March 13 offered the audience reasons to hope and actions to take to address the crisis.

“The good news,” said Tucker, cofounder of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, “is that young people, indigenous people, and religious leaders and laity ... are mounting a fierce moral force. It is like a leaven, like a yeast. That’s what gives us hope. I invite us against all odds to a hope that tells us we are not alone in the great ecosystems of the Earth and we are here to continue these forces of life.”

Titled “Beyond Despair and Denial: Facing Climate Change with Moral Urgency and Hope,” the Atlanta panel was part of a series of Divinity School public forums held around the country to apply a theological and ethical lens to pressing public issues. Held at the Cathedral of St. Philip (where Sam Candler ‘82 M.Div. serves as Dean), the event featured the following panelists:

- [Clifton Granby](#), Assistant Professor of Ethics and Philosophy at Yale Divinity School
- [Codi Norred \(link is external\)](#), Program Director of Georgia Interfaith Power & Light
- [Jon Sawyer '74 B.A. \(link is external\)](#), Founding Director of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, and
- [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#), Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar in Religion and Ecology at the Divinity School and School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

In his introductory remarks, YDS Dean Greg Sterling quoted Gus Speth, who was Dean of F&ES from 1999 to 2009:

“Gus said, ‘I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science, we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy. And to deal with those issues, we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we scientists do not know how to do that.’”

“That,” Sterling said, “is the business of religion. And that is why we are here tonight.”

Granby, who teaches a course on environmental justice and ethics (among other courses), spoke about a constant “state of crisis ... that makes and marks our contemporary moment.”

Whether it’s a crisis narrowly averted or one looming in the future, whether it’s a crisis in the banking system or national defense or the health of our democracy, “this nagging sense of crisis makes it difficult for us to widen our moral sphere of concern beyond what is immediate, practical, and near,” Granby said. “All of this encourages not just denial of climate change but ... acceptance of the terms of what those in power would tell us is most practical.”

[View photos of the event. \(link is external\)](#)

Granby called on the audience of Yale alumni, church members, and concerned members of the public to “tell different stories about ourselves, about the land, about what flourishing and community look like.” This, he said, “will require us to jettison our desires for sovereignty and dominion. We’ll also need to make room for lament. There are no easy solutions here, but there are more responsible and sensible ways to live. I take hope in that.”

Approximately 150 people attended the event, with another 160 watching the live broadcast. The event was presented by YDS and the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and cosponsored by the Yale Club of Georgia.

<https://divinity.yale.edu/news/yds-climate-panel-pushes-past-denial-and-despair>

March 15, 2019

W.S. Merwin, prize-winning poet of nature, dies at 91

PBS

HONOLULU — W.S. Merwin, a prolific and versatile poetry master who evolved through a wide range of styles as he celebrated nature, condemned war and industrialism and reached for the elusive past, died Friday. He was 91.

A Pulitzer Prize winner and former U.S. [poet laureate](#), Merwin completed more than 20 books, from early works inspired by myths and legends to fiery protests against environmental destruction and the conflict in Vietnam to late meditations on age and time.

He wrote rhymes and blank verse, a brief report on the month of January and a book-length story in verse about colonialism and the birth of [modern Hawaii](#). Like his hero, Henry David Thoreau, he was inspired equally by reverence for the planet and anger against injustice.

He died in his sleep at his home on the Hawaiian island of Maui, according to publisher Copper Canyon Press and the Merwin Conservancy, which the poet founded.

“He is an artist with a very clear spiritual profile, and intellectual and moral consistency, which encompasses both his work and his life,” fellow poet Edward Hirsch once said of him.

Citing the Vietnam War, he declined a Pulitzer in 1971 for “The Carrier of Ladders,” saying that he was “too conscious of being an American to accept public congratulation with good grace, or to welcome it except as an occasion for expressing openly a shame which many Americans feel.”

He also rejected membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters (now the American Academy of Arts and Letters), but changed his mind five years later, in 1977.

Among other awards he accepted: a National Book Award for “Migration” in 2005, a Pulitzer in 2009 for “The Shadow of Sirius,” and such lifetime achievement honors as the Tanning Prize, the Bollingen Prize and a gold medal from the arts academy. He was chosen the country’s poet laureate in 2010 and served a single one-year term.

The son of a Presbyterian minister, he was raised in the urban East during the Great Depression, spent years as a young man in France, Mexico, Spain and England and lived his final decades as a Buddhist in a solar-powered house he designed on an old pineapple plantation, surrounded by a rain forest, on the northeast coast of Maui.

“There was something incomplete about the world of streets and sidewalks and cement,” he told the Paris Review in 1986. “I remember walking in the streets of New York and New Jersey and telling myself, as a kind of reassurance, that the ground was really under there.”

William Stanley Merwin was born in New York City in 1927. He soon moved to Union City, New Jersey, living for years on a street now called “W.S. Merwin Way,” then to Scranton, Pennsylvania.

In a long, autobiographical poem, “Testimony,” he remembered his father as a weary, disappointed man, subsisting on “pinched salaries” and “traveling sick with some nameless illuminating ill.” His mother was orphaned early in life and grieved again when her baby, a boy she meant to name after her father, died “when he had scarcely wakened.”

In a household as grim as an abandoned parking lot, the way out was pointed by words, which seemed to float around Merwin like magic bubbles. He would try to memorize scripture he heard his father recite and fairy tales his mother toll him. By age 13, he was already composing hymns.

He received a scholarship from Princeton University, becoming the first family member to attend college, and began meeting some of the great poets of the present and future. Galway Kinnell was a classmate at Princeton, and John Berryman a teacher.

After graduating, he lived in Spain and tutored the son of Robert Graves. In London, he became close with Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes and was torn by the collapse of their marriage. Merwin’s then-wife, Dido Merwin, would allege that Plath had a crush on him.

[WATCH: W. S. Merwin reads ‘Rain Light’](#)

In Washington, D.C., when he was 18, Merwin had a memorable encounter with Ezra Pound, whom he visited at a psychiatric hospital. Pound urged Merwin to write 75 lines a day (advice he did not follow), warned him he didn’t have enough experience to write great poetry and advised him to learn another language as a way of better mastering English. Merwin would translate more than 20 books by other poets, from languages ranging from Sanskrit to Swedish.

Merwin’s promise was obvious. His first collection, “A Mask for Janus,” was selected by W.H. Auden for the coveted Yale Series of Younger Poets competition and was published in 1952. Throughout the 1950s, he wrote poems and plays, including a verse production of “Rumpelstiltskin.”

Times spent in Boston with Robert Lowell convinced him to concentrate on poetry, and by the end of the decade, he was regarded as a highly talented artist immersed in Old English literature, his verse likened by The New York Times to “a broad river flowing through peaceful land.”

Peace — the flow of the natural world — was a cause he actively defended. Near the end of World War II, he spent seven months under psychiatric care because he refused to undergo any duties that might lead to violence, which he had feared since the days his father would beat him.

By the early 1960s, he was marching against nuclear weapons and throwing off the rules of grammar as if they were a suit and tie, inspired by his “growing sense that punctuation alluded to an assumed allegiance to the rational protocol of written language.”

Meanwhile, Vietnam and urbanization darkened his vision. “I/can hear the blood crawling over the plains,” he wrote in “The Child.” In “The Crust,” the downfall of a tree is a metaphor for the severing of civilization:

and with the tree
went all the lives in it
that slept in it ate in it
met in it believed in it

Merwin examined his own mind in “[Plane](#)” and found it “infinitely divided and hopeless/like a stockyard seen from above.” His poem “Presidents” was a roll call of dishonor, for “the president of shame,” “the president of lies” and the “president of loyalty,” who “recommends blindness to the blind.” In “Sunset After Rain,” he concluded that “The darkness is cold/because the stars do not believe in each other.”

In the 1970s, he settled permanently in Hawaii and studied under the Zen Buddhist master Robert Aitken. Divorced years earlier from Dorothy Jeanne Ferry and from Dido Milroy, he married his third wife, Paula Schwartz, in a Buddhist ceremony in 1983. Paula died in 2017.

Merwin’s work became sparser, rooted in the [Hawaiian landscape](#) and his personal past — how it’s often forgotten, how it’s never understood at the moment it’s lived, how words themselves were imperfect bridges to lost time.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/w-s-merwin-prize-winning-poet-of-nature-dies-at-91>

March 18, 2019

Faith activists urge UN Environment Assembly to address human side of climate change

By Fredrick Nzwili
National Catholic Reporter

NAIROBI, Kenya — At a small tent on the edge of the U.N. campus here, environmental activists from the world's faith traditions huddled on the sidelines of last week's March 11-15 meeting of some 5,000 environmental scientists, politicians and civil society, the fourth gathering of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

As the official delegates discussed current environmental challenges, sustainable consumption and production, the faith leaders, who joined the assembly for the first time in a U.N.-sponsored event called "Faith for Earth Dialogue," talked about what religion's role is in environmental protection.

"Religious leaders have a unique role to play in promoting ecological sustainability, especially because 85 percent of the (world's) people are affiliated with a religion," said Rabbi Yonatan

Neril, who is the founder and executive director of the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development in Jerusalem and attended the event.

The faith-based group unexpectedly served as a spiritual presence after the Ethiopian Airlines crash, which particularly affected the U.N.'s offices in Nairobi, a hub of the international aid community that lost several members in the disaster.

The assembly, which represented more than 170 United Nations member states, said it had delivered a bold blueprint for change that directs a radical shift in the approach to tackling environmental challenges.

The group also agreed on a series of non-binding resolutions, key among them a proposal to protect oceans and fragile ecosystems.

But those attending the Faith for Earth Dialogue urged the U.N. to recognize the growing religious wave of concern and called for dramatic steps while saying that enough was not being done to address climate change and related environmental challenges.

"There should be no mistake that more and more religious communities are clear that we face a clear emergency," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, the executive director of GreenFaith, an American interfaith coalition for the environment.

"We need a stronger representation of values, combined with science, to underlie the policies of the world in relationship to the environment," said Harper.

At the same time, Harper said, it was not easy for intergovernmental bodies like the U.N. to integrate faith voices because their audiences are nation states, for whom religion can be a complicated subject.

The world's religions can look for ways to change their own cultures to make faith itself more sustainable, said Neril.

"Meat in particular has a disproportional impact on climate change because cows emit methane from their digestive systems," said the rabbi. Changing diets can be difficult, but religious teaching can have a powerful effect on what we put in our mouths and can support compassion toward animals.

Fr. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, coordinator of the Sector on "Ecology and Creation" at the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said he took hope from the increasing spiritual response to climate change, including the indigenous communities around the world who view themselves as the protectors of the land or planet.

He cited climate change as one reason Pope Francis has called a special synod for October of this year of Roman Catholic bishops from the Pan-Amazonian region.

"He (Pope Francis) believes at the period of planetary emergency, the answer can come from these people, who have defended our common home for thousands of years. We can learn from their indigenous wisdom," said the priest. "It is a time when the whole world will sit at the feet of the indigenous people and learn from them to take care of our common home."

Experts say tropical forests that are home to other indigenous groups in the Congo Basin, Asia and Central America also help regulate regional and international weather patterns.

Above all, the faith activists urged the U.N. delegations to the assembly to approach climate change as an urgent human problem as much as a scientific one.

Bright Mawudor, the deputy general secretary of the African Conference of Churches, said in a speech to her fellow faith leaders that climate change was the world's common future. "It's as real as the food that we eat or as the clothes we wear. We need to tackle it with urgency," Mawudor said.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/faith-activists-urge-un-environment-assembly-address-human-side-climate-change>

March 20, 2019

Holy See: Church is committed to integral ecology of indigenous people

At an international conference in Georgetown University, Washington DC, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York, spoke about the Church's commitment to the indigenous people.

By Robin Gomes
Vatican News

Integral ecology, which is a fundamental part of the Church's proclamation of the Gospel and the concrete exercise of charity, calls urgently for a new solidarity between the various sectors of the human family but in a very special way with the indigenous peoples, particularly in the **Amazonia**.

Archbishop **Bernardito Auza**, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York made the point at an international conference on "**Integral Ecology**" in the Amazon region and other biomes, being held in Georgetown University, Washington DC, March 19-21. The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) is organizing the conference.

In a lengthy speech, the Vatican diplomat elaborated the efforts and commitment of Pope Francis, the Holy See and the United Nations to the indigenous people and their cause.

Pope Francis and indigenous people

Arch. Auza noted that Pope Francis in his encyclical “**Laudato Si**”, urges all to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions, not merely out of defense for their rights but in recognition of how much indigenous peoples have to teach the world about the integrated ecology that the Church vigorously proclaims as part of the Gospel of Creation. They indicate lines of proper **ecological conversion** and **ecological education**.

The Pope calls for special care for indigenous communities because their lives, communities, and cultural traditions are **gravely endangered**, with their lands, culture, rights and dignity overlooked, sacrificed or even trampled by the economic interests of others. This is particularly true in the vast region of the Amazon, the largest tropical forest in the world, encompassing 9 nations.

During his visit to **Brazil in 2013**, Pope Francis pointed out that the **Church’s presence in the Amazon** is not one of someone with bags packed and ready to leave after having exploited everything possible. Hence the Church’s work needs to be encouraged and re-launched in order to consolidate, as it were, the Church’s “Amazonian face”. And the upcoming Synod on the Pan-Amazon Region, in the Vatican in October, to focus on “new paths for the Church and for integral ecology,” is an opportunity to show this Amazonian face to the world.

During his 2018 visit to the Amazon in **Puerto Maldonado, Peru**, the Pope noted that the “native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are at present.”

He spoke about the threat from **extractive exploitation** and pressure by great business interests that want to grab the rich natural resources of the Amazonia, dealing a devastating assault on life through environmental contamination and illegal mining.

There are also threats from certain **policies and movements which under the guise of preserving nature** and the forests, lead to the oppression of the native people, depriving them of their land, natural resources and livelihood. According to Pope Francis, the peoples themselves, and not just their lands, need to be defended and promoted.

For this to happen, what is needed first is to break “the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants.” Secondly, one must support promising initiatives coming from indigenous communities and organizations which advocate that the native peoples and communities themselves be the guardians of the woodlands. This is what is being done by groups such as REPAM and other networks.

The UN and indigenous people

Arch. Auza also highlighted the UN’s commitment to the indigenous peoples and their issues.

Through the annual **Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues** (PFII), that brings representatives of indigenous people from around the world in New York, he said, the UN highlights their economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

The Holy See, which participates actively in the Permanent Forum and its side events, also sponsors conferences with REPAM and other groups.

In the upcoming Permanent Forum, Arch. Auza said, the Holy See intends to sponsor a conference on integral ecology as a response to the urgent cries and horizons of the Amazon region.

Another important UN effort towards the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples, the Filipino archbishop pointed out, is the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**.

It is a comprehensive list on their rights to self-determination, to protect their culture, to self-govern and participate in their economic, environmental, social, human and cultural development, to health, and to land rights. It also serves as the most comprehensive reference for states and the international community.

Through the **Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, under the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, Arch. Auza said, the UN assists Member States in implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Through the office of the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, the UN also works for the interests of the indigenous people.

Holy See and indigenous people

Arch. Auza pointed to **4 areas** that the Holy See puts emphasis on in its statements at the UN with regard to the implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Holy See stresses the harmonization of their **right to cultural and social development alongside their economic development**.

It stresses the “**prior and informed consent**” of indigenous peoples for initiatives that affect them, and that nothing should be done about them without them.

The third is respect for their indigenous identity in **participation** at the local and national levels. Lastly, the Holy See underscores the **collective right** of indigenous peoples to their **lands and resources**, giving them the political, economic and social space necessary to affirm their identity and to become agents of their own development and destiny.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2019-03/holy-see-un-auza-indigenous-amazonia-integral-ecology.html>

March 21, 2019

Amazonia Synod - US Conference stresses Church commitment to indigenous people

Independent Catholic News

Representatives of the Pan Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) have been meeting with senior Church leaders at a US university this week, ahead of October's Synod of Bishops on Amazonia. Georgetown University in Washington DC hosted a conference 19-21 March, organised by REPAM, titled, 'Integral Ecology: A Synodal response from the Amazon Region and other Biomes and Essential Territories for the Care of Our Common Home'.

Participants were drawn from around the world with a strong presence of cardinals and bishops from the Global South. Topics discussed included: 'A world in Socio-Environmental Crisis', 'Testimonies: The Cry of the People, the Cry of the Earth', and 'Integral Ecology and the Church's mission'.

Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York, spoke about the commitment of Pope Francis, the Holy See and the United Nations to indigenous people and their cause. Archbishop Auza noted that Pope Francis in his encyclical 'Laudato Si', urges all to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions, not merely out of defense for their rights but in recognition of how much indigenous peoples have to teach the world about the inter-relationship between environment and sustainable development. The Holy See underscored the collective right of indigenous peoples to their lands and resources, he said, giving them the political, economic and social space necessary to affirm their identity and to control their development and destiny.

Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, the Brazilian President of REPAM, was present and Columban Fr Peter Hughes, who works with REPAM and is helping it prepare for the Synod. He has spent five decades as a missionary in Latin America, based in Peru. The Irish missionary supports Church initiatives to protect the biodiversity of life in the Amazon and the indigenous people. "The Synod is an important moment for the voice of the Amazon and its peoples to be heard" says Fr Peter; "their cry, absent until now, has arrived on the agenda of society at large and the Church". Fr Hughes feels: "The Amazon is of increasing importance both in itself, a geographical region which occupies almost half the South American subcontinent, and also a biosphere under pressure regarding universal planetary issues, these include climate equilibrium and future availability of basics such as water and air, and what is now happening in the region has significance for future life on the planet".

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo from Myanmar and Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle from the Philippines were present and Victoria Tauli Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Indigenous People. "We have to develop a green theology of liberation" said Cardinal Bo. "

The final day of the conference opened with a reflection by Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder and director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University. She spoke of a new hope that

is blowing through the Church and world that is coming from the voices of indigenous peoples, of the Earth and of youth. She spoke of a new yearning in the Church to humbly listen and learn from other cultures, other faiths, and the universe. The remainder of day was dedicated to listening to the geographic working groups that imagined how the Synod on the Amazon can be territorialised throughout the world.

The Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region is scheduled to meet in Rome in October 2019 with the theme, 'The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for integral ecology'.

Link: www.caritas.org/what-we-do/development/repam/

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/36759>

March 25, 2019

Bishops say EPA plan to roll back pollution rule would harm the unborn

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Washington — Unborn children would face greater health risks if the Environmental Protection Agency moves to rescind a rule regulating hazardous air pollutants emitted by power plants, said the chairmen of two U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committees.

The bishops argued in a March 22 statement that the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, or MATS, are needed to protect pregnant women as well.

"The proposed change to the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards rule is troubling since it is well-documented that pregnant mothers and their unborn children are the most sensitive to mercury pollution and its adverse health effects," said Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Added Bishop Frank Dewane of Venice, Florida, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, "The MATS rule reflects a proper respect for life of the human person and of God's creation — a great example of integral ecology called for in 'Laudato Si', " Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment.

The bishops' comments coincided with a March 18 letter sent by a bishops' conference official in response to the publication of the revised Environmental Protection Agency rule in the Federal Register Feb. 7.

The agency said it had concluded that it is not "appropriate and necessary" to regulate hazardous air pollutants from power plans because the cost of doing so "grossly outweighs" the benefits gained by doing so.

Anthony Picarello Jr., bishops' conference associate general secretary and general counsel, opposed the change in a detailed six-page letter, writing that the current standards "align strongly with key principles of Catholic social teaching."

He expressed concern that although the proposed rule change does not remove power plants from the list of regulated pollution sources under the Clean Air Act, it "greatly weakens legal justification for the rule and could ultimately cause great harm to human health and the environment."

Picarello said that church teaching "calls us to care of God's creation and protect the common good and the life and dignity of human persons, especially the poor and vulnerable, from conception until natural death."

"In short, by failing to take into account the full range of costs, especially those imposed on the most vulnerable, the proposed rule fails to respect the life and dignity of the human person," Picarello's letter said as it outlined a series of technical findings on the danger to health posed by mercury and other hazardous air pollutants.

The bishops' conference supported the standards when they were proposed by President Barack Obama's administration in 2011 because "even small amounts of these harmful pollutants in the environment are linked to health problems, particularly in children before and after birth, the poor and the elderly," Picarello's letter said, quoting from the bishop's original comment on MATS.

The 180-degree turn by the Environmental Protection Agency came in response to a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision that found the federal agency erred by not considering cost in determining that broader regulation of power plant air pollutants was necessary.

Writing for the 5-4 majority in the case, then-Associate Justice Antonin Scalia wrote that the Environmental Protection Agency must consider costs and that agency officials misinterpreted the Clean Air Act in determining costs were not part of the equation when introducing MATS.

In separate testimony, the Catholic Climate Covenant echoed the U.S. bishops' conference — among the group's 18 national partner organizations — saying that Catholic social teaching measures every institution by "whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person."

"In this spirit, Catholic Climate Covenant believes the proposed rule threatens, rather than enhances the life and dignity of the human person and is a renunciation of the Environmental Protection Agency's mission to 'protect human health and the environment,'" said Jose Aguto, Covenant associate director, in testimony delivered March 18 at a public hearing on the proposed revision in Washington.

The Covenant asked EPA to give "due consideration" to the co-benefits of regulating mercury pollutants, especially from power plants run on fossil fuels. Among those benefits, it said, is technology used to prevent mercury from entering the air also reduces exposure to other

hazardous air pollutants, such as carcinogens like arsenic, cadmium and chromium, as well as lead, hydrogen chloride and sulfur dioxide, "which can cause chronic and acute health disorders to the human body."

Catholic Climate Covenant also cited a 2016 EPA report that estimated more than 240,000 children had been exposed prenatally to mercury contamination. It said the proposed rollback failed to respect the life and dignity of the human person at all stages of development.

"We urge that the Agency find that regulation of these emissions from coal- and oil-fired power plants to be appropriate and necessary. We ask that EPA uphold the existing Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. By doing so, human life and the environment is valued justly, and EPA's mission is honored," Aguto said.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/bishops-say-epa-plan-roll-back-pollution-rule-would-harm-unborn>

March 26, 2019

Women in Amazon take more prominent role in environmental protection

By Rhina Guidos
Crux

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In indigenous Kichwa communities, women like Patricia Gualinga have traditionally taken on the role of wife, mother and cultivator of the crops that families use to survive in Ecuador's Amazonian region of Sarayaku.

In recent years, however, as corporations and other entities looking to extract precious minerals and resources have entered indigenous communities' ancestral lands in the Amazon, that role has expanded to include community leader and defender of the environment for women like 49-year-old Gualinga.

Women have increasingly participated as leaders at the national and international level in the Amazon's environmental activist circles, she said, in part because women - in addition to experiencing firsthand environmental degradation and its impact on the family - also experience abuse, exploitation and greater marginalization that has skyrocketed with the exploitation of the environment.

Others were not discussing those abuses, that's why women stepped up, Gualinga said in a March 22 interview with *Catholic News Service*, during an international "Integral Ecology" conference at Georgetown University in Washington. The conference was held in anticipation of an October Synod of Bishops on the Amazon at the Vatican.

Though the laity will not be able to vote at the synod, that does not mean women such as Gualinga, members of indigenous communities, and others won't have a voice or an impact at

the Vatican gathering, said Cardinal Claudio Hummes. The Brazilian cardinal is president of the Pan-Amazonian Church Network (REPAM for its acronym in Spanish), one of the main players for the Vatican meeting that plans to raise awareness and an action plan to fight environmental degradation and its consequences, such as global warming and displacement of indigenous communities in the Amazon region.

Women, including many from indigenous communities, have been invited to participate, including as auditors at the synod, allowing them to voice their growing concerns, said Hummes.

“We recognize that when we speak about the church in the Amazon, women play a special part in it, a great part in it,” Hummes said during a March 20 news conference at Georgetown. “Many are at the forefront of their (church) communities in the absence of priests.”

And increasingly, many are at the forefront of physical attacks against activists as conflicts over lands and resources grow. Last year, Gualinga’s home was attacked with rocks and she was physically threatened following years of her objections and activism against extractive industries that threaten Kichwa communities and lands in Ecuador.

Though Gualinga filed a complaint about the attack, the perpetrator was never brought to justice.

To church leaders such as Hummes, women play an important part in the “new paths” the church can pursue in greater cooperation with indigenous communities whose existence is at peril given environmental and other threats in their midst in places such as the Amazon.

Many women, along with indigenous communities, participated in the initial phase of consultations that took place in November to prepare for the synod, Hummes said. The question of women’s role in the church in the Amazon was “explicitly considered,” with some discussion about ministries for them, Hummes said, adding that it was hard to say at this point what those may look like, since the discussion is ongoing.

Because of the role laywomen, as well as of women religious in the Amazon, have played in the defense of the environment and in indigenous communities, the church “must open spaces” for them, said Gualinga.

“Many (women) are the ones who have paved the way,” she said. “We are the ones who have confronted a lot of these trespasses ... in the Amazon.”

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2019/03/26/women-in-amazon-take-more-prominent-role-in-environmental-protection/>

March 28, 2019

In battle for Amazon, church officials unite with indigenous communities

By Rhina Guidos
Crux

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Catholic Church has been present in the Amazon for centuries, but that presence has not come without errors, said Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno. One of those errors is the way it once approached the region's indigenous communities, he told a news conference during a seminar to discuss how the church and indigenous communities can respond to environmental threats.

"We believed that indigenous communities had to become like us," said Barreto. "Now, there's been a change, a conversion to try to learn from indigenous communities about how to live in harmony with others and with a transcendent being. It's important for us to learn from those who have lived there."

Barreto, along with other international church leaders, members of indigenous communities, and environmental organizations related to the Catholic Church and other faith-based institutions gathered in Washington March 19-21 ahead of an October Synod of Bishops on the Amazon at the Vatican. Prelates and others at the synod will consider environmental situations in the Amazon and chart a plan of action. For that meeting to be fruitful, Barreto said during a March 20 news conference at Georgetown University, it is important to include the voice and experiences of the region's indigenous communities.

"It is part of a process," said Barreto, archbishop of Huancayo, Peru, and vice president of the Pan-Amazonian Church Network (REPAM for its acronym in Spanish), one of the main players for the Vatican meeting.

"We share in the suffering, such as killings of indigenous people, while trying to keep hope alive and that (indigenous communities) will teach us how to live in that integral ecology that the church hopes for," he said.

As the Amazon and communities who live there come under threat from corporations, governments, drug traffickers and others vying for the forest's resources, the church has embarked on a path of collaboration to help in the defense of indigenous ancestral lands, as well as to protect the environmental benefits the Amazon provides for humanity as the "world's lung."

It is called the "world's lung" because the abundance of trees in its rainforest help absorb global emissions of carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen. The Amazon's deforestation will not just displace indigenous communities who have long called the region home but may also accelerate the warming of the planet, leading to extreme weather patterns everywhere.

The church, as well as the world, has much to learn about the spiritual, economic and social connections made by indigenous communities and nature, church officials say, and much of it was visible during presentations by members of those communities at the Georgetown gathering. That's where those like Candido Mezua of Panama's Embera community shared a vision of

nature, the resources it provides for survival, as well as the respect given to it for its benefit for humanity, not just for one community.

When the Embera speak of the family, “we refer to the human family, to society collectively,” Mezua said, much in the same way that Pope Francis refers to the earth as “the common home.”

When you look at situations from that collective and spiritual perspective naturally found in indigenous communities, Mezua said, it becomes easier to go beyond the differences that sometimes make it easier to exploit nature and other human beings. What some of those communities have long practiced is not so different than what the pope has said, except that he put it in writing in his 2015 groundbreaking *Laudato Si'* encyclical, Mezua added.

“Regulations alone are not going to solve the (environmental) problem ... there has to be a change from a global perspective about the common home ... about restoring Mother Earth” to balance, he said.

The Vatican synod and its work with indigenous communities can help confront environmental and humanitarian challenges in the Amazon region, said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a Filipina and the U.N. special rapporteur for the rights of indigenous peoples, who attended the Georgetown meeting.

One of those issues is how to help members of indigenous communities in the Amazon who've been threatened or jailed under false pretenses because of their activism to protest the destruction they see around them, said Tauli-Corpuz. At the Georgetown meeting, there was talk about a possible network of legal help Catholic Church institutions, groups and organizations could provide to those facing legal dangers as threats against indigenous environmental activists grow, as well as providing some form of sanctuary.

The group Global Witness, which tallies statistics about threats and crimes against environmentalists, said in its latest data available that 201 environmental activists were killed in 2017, with many of those murders occurring in the Amazon. That does not include death threats, arrests, sexual assaults, abductions and other attacks faced by indigenous activists.

“The synod is going to be important if the church gets involved in helping protect them,” said Tauli-Corpuz. “This is not just good for the region, but for the rest of the world.”

Those communities, after all, are the best guardians and protectors of a land that provides great environmental benefits for the rest of the world, Tauli-Corpuz said.

“I believe that every person who is concerned about life and about the earth should really be working together to protect the Amazon,” she said.

The church, because of its global presence and numbers, can also rally an unprecedented defense for the Amazon, said Patricia Gualinga of the indigenous Kichwa community in Ecuador.

“This battle that is heading for us, it’s not one that can be undertaken alone,” said Gualinga, referring to the warming of the planet and the consequences that will be unleashed on all of the planet’s inhabitants, not just indigenous communities.

Though indigenous communities have long been at the forefront of the fight for the environment in the Amazon, the spotlight the Vatican will shed on it in October can only help the cause, Gualinga said, adding that though success will be measured by the actions proposed and carried out after the synod, great strides already have been made by having church officials engage with indigenous communities in an unprecedented way.

“Twenty years ago, we would have never been able to sit down like this and talk about our common home,” she said. “We have to value the advances that have been made ... we have to recognize that the church has moved forward.”

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2019/03/28/in-battle-for-amazon-church-officials-unity-with-indigenous-communities/>

April 1, 2019

People of faith must act to confront the challenges of climate change

By Temperince Morgan and David A. Armstrong
Miami Herald

Faith communities are addressing challenges posed by climate change in South Florida through both teaching and action. In his 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home,” Pope Francis identifies climate change as a moral issue and calls for “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.

“We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”

Similarly, Jewish teachings stress taking care of the planet and protecting natural resources for future generations. For Muslims, the Quran describes mankind as stewards of the Earth and calls on us to reflect upon how our actions affect the environment.

On April 4 and 5, St. Thomas University and The Nature Conservancy are hosting the Second International Conference on Climate, Nature and Society, seeking to answer the question of how individuals and faith communities can address some of the greatest challenges of our times. A diverse group of leaders from several faiths, sustainability focused organizations, and government will gather at St. Thomas’ Miami Gardens campus to discuss the changing climate, implications and solutions. The conference will explore the critical role of communities of faith in fostering climate action.

Faith leaders are already educating their congregations and leading conversations on the importance of respecting and protecting our environment. In his encyclical, Pope Francis said: “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.”

Also, congregations are engaging with the broader community through mission, including deploying solar panels on sanctuaries and temples, creating community carbon funds to finance clean energy and serving residents who are displaced by flooded streets and hurricanes. In fact, following Hurricanes Irma and Michael, communities of faith played an important role in providing for the basic needs of their members and communities. They have seen first-hand the detrimental consequences of climate change on fellow human beings and the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

For The Nature Conservancy, whose mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends, addressing climate change requires education and action from individuals of all backgrounds, as well as the collaborative nonpartisan action of elected leaders.

The Nature Conservancy and St. Thomas are committed to building a climate-conscious community that learns from those of various religious backgrounds. Both understand the importance of faith leaders in amplifying climate-change education. The moral perspective of the faithful adds further urgency to the scientific data all around us. This data confirms the affects of climate change, including warming oceans that contribute to harmful algal blooms and coral bleaching, sea-level rise that floods our neighborhoods and rising temperatures that affect the ability of residents to work and play outdoors.

Climate change is inclusive, touching all of us across diverse cultures, political parties, locations and faiths. Because faith-based communities have global reach and their messages are shared across numerous languages, we believe this interfaith conference can be a model for climate action in cities across the state, US and the world. We invite the South Florida community to join us for The Second International Conference on Climate, Nature and Society, a forum that will range from the science of how climate change is affecting our South Florida environment and health, to a discussion of how we can act to be good stewards of the planet through our daily activities and decisions. More information or to register for this free conference, go to stu.edu/climateconference.

Together, we can ensure that our planet is thriving for future generations.

Temperince Morgan is the executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Florida. David A. Armstrong J.D., is the 10th president of St. Thomas University.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article228692799.html>

April 4, 2019

Cambridge's burgeoning Muslim community to benefit from new 'eco' Mosque

By Nashwa Gowanlock
Environmental Journal

A new 'eco' mosque in Cambridge hosted its first morning prayers this month — it's a unique building with world-class environmental credentials and hopes to better serve the city's burgeoning Muslim community. Freelance journalist Nashwa Gowanlock went to visit for *Environment Journal*.

Beyond the striking university campuses of historic Cambridge, lies a lesser-known part of the city that boasts its own chronicle — one of tolerance and diversity.

The heart of this multicultural community is Mill Road, a narrow and heaving thoroughfare lined with ethnic eateries and specialist supermarkets.

Nestled within the Victorian terraced housing is one of the city's newest builds — the UK's first eco-mosque.

A first not only in the country but also throughout Europe, the new mosque will serve some of the city's estimated 8000 Muslims — including students — who hail from around 60 nations.

The project was founded by Tim Winter, a renowned scholar and lecturer in Islamic Studies at Cambridge University.

'The mosque has been designed as a facility for local residents of whatever religious persuasion,' Winter says.

'Its public areas, including the gardens, cafeteria, and teaching space, will provide a significant new amenity for all our neighbours.'

Cambridge's population has experienced a boom in recent decades, due in large part to the development of the city's science and technology industries.

With only a handful of smaller mosques serving the city, demand for such a space to accommodate its Muslim residents had been mounting.

Community Regeneration

The mosque itself has been ten years in the making, with the once-derelict land at the far end of the street, in the Romsey neighbourhood, acquired in 2008.

According to local historian and guide, Allan Brigham, the area past the railway bridge has always been an area of change.

'200 years ago, the only people living here were farm labourers,' says Brigham.

‘After the railway came in 1845, Romsey Town became really an area for railway workers living here, which was a community completely unknown in Cambridge and they came mainly from the east of England. They weren’t people who lived in Cambridge before.’

A Romsey local of 40 years, Brigham was a member of a committee consulted in the project’s initial planning stages.

‘We said this end of Mill Road needed an area of greenery,’ Brigham says. ‘It will create a bit of breathing space and be really attractive. It will – and has already – helped uplift this end of the road.’

Creating a calm oasis

Inspired by the Islamic gardens of India and Spain, this greenery at the entrance to the mosque was sculpted by garden designer, Emma Clarke, as a contemplative space.

Along with the café and the atrium, which will host various functions and exhibitions, the garden was designed for all visitors to enjoy.

The mosque’s tree-shaped columns made from Swiss timber are another distinctive feature, meeting at the ceiling in a latticed canopy.

Selected in 2008 through an international competition were architects Marks Barfield, who also designed the London Eye and Kew treetop walkway.

This project was principally the vision of the late David Marks together with his partner, Julia Barfield, who says that marrying tradition and local character with contemporary design was a priority.

‘Throughout the world and throughout history, mosques have taken on the character of their area — they’ve taken on the vernacular of the architecture,’ Barfield says.

‘The idea of the calm oasis is very important in Islam. We imagined the site covered in a glade of trees and then the trees became structural trees and then they were joined at the top with this geometry.’

Eco-benefits

Every detail of the mosque was designed to specification and environmental concerns were at the forefront of structural plans.

‘The mosque incorporates a number of green technologies,’ Winter explains, ‘including air-source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting, grey water recycling, sedum roofs, photo-voltaic arrays and passive ventilation.’

‘These and other features respond to the Qur’anic insistence on the sanctity of the natural world and the commandment to avoid waste and extravagance.’

Natural light is diffused via circular skylights, supplemented with low-energy LED artificial lighting. Energy use is designed to be minimal, using static heating and natural ventilation supplemented by displacement cool air supply.

‘Cambridge is a symbolic capital city of modernity,’ Winter says.

‘This build signals Islam’s constructive and healing response to the challenges and problems which the modern world faces. Muslims should be at the forefront of the fight against waste and global warming.’

Social factors were also measured in planning the configuration of the building, whose height was determined by that of the local three-storey terraces; its brick façade also complements the architecture of the town.

The mosque’s gold dome may be an eye-catching attribute, but there will be no minaret and no call to prayer broadcast outside the building.

‘Sustainability is not just environmental; it’s also social,’ Barfield says.

‘In order for it to fit into this local setting, it needs to be of this place and of this time. But it also needs to celebrate Islamic culture.’

A city of tolerance

Over £23m was raised to fund the project, including donations from the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs and at least 8000 individuals. at least 8000 individuals.

Although it has yet to launch officially, the mosque temporarily opened its doors to the local Muslim community for its first Friday prayers on March 15.

Despite that morning’s news of shootings at two New Zealand mosques, which left 50 people dead, the prayer hall at the new Cambridge mosque, which has a 1000-person capacity, was packed with worshippers.

‘Hopefully, the mosque will be part of the community in the way that all the other churches in the area are,’ Brigham says.

Dubbed ‘the community of communities’, Mill Road has long been a landmark of unity.

Its Winter Fair, during which the entire length of the street is closed off to traffic, draws huge crowds every year.

Locals mostly run the stalls, exhibitions and stage performances that line the street, no matter the weather.

According to the organisers, the event is ‘created and run by people from the Mill Road area’. It is a ‘celebration of the area’s community,’ as well as its ‘culture and way of life’.

‘Most main roads divide communities,’ Brigham adds. ‘Mill road, one way or another, brings communities from both sides of the road together. And I think that’s what makes it unique in Cambridge.’

Its popularity is even beginning to gain acclaim, with Romsey Town being listed by Travel Supermarket in 2018 as being one of the country’s ‘hippest neighbourhoods’.

This year’s fair will be a chance for one of its newest neighbours to participate.

One of those welcoming them is Cambridge councillor for Romsey Ward, Anna Smith.

‘Romsey is a wonderful, diverse and vibrant ward, with a fantastic community spirit,’ Smith says.

‘I’m thrilled that this beautiful new mosque, with its welcoming congregation, is coming to Romsey.’

Offering parallel values of respect for a place and its people, the mosque should find itself in good company as the city of Cambridge continues to thrive.

<https://environmentjournal.online/articles/cambridges-burgeoning-muslim-community-to-benefit-from-new-eco-mosque/>

April 5, 2019

Connecting the environment and the church: Nathan Empsall ’19 M.Div.

Yale Divinity School

Nathan Empsall ’19 M.Div. is one of six [dual-degree](#) students at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Yale Divinity School, where he is also earning a diploma in Anglican Studies at Berkeley Divinity School at YDS. He recently completed a survey of more than 100 randomly selected Episcopal congregations from across the country, attempting to gauge churches’ level of engagement with creation care and climate change. He has presented his findings at several academic conferences as well as to the Episcopal Church’s Task Force on Care of Creation and Environmental Racism, of which he is a member.

YDS interviewed Empsall about his survey and related projects.

What motivated you to undertake this survey?

According to the Pew Research Center, only 22 percent of church-goers report hearing about the environment in church. I wanted to find out what challenges or objections prevent churches from starting creation ministries. My hope is that the survey's findings will be useful to environmental communicators and theologians, helping them craft resources that meet parishes where they are.

Who responded to the survey?

Just over 100 parishes submitted responses. I have numbers from the first 92, although I still need to add data from a few late responses. One person responded on behalf of each congregation—mostly clergy, but some lay leaders too. The responses were from every part of the country and were split pretty evenly between rural, urban, suburban, and small towns. The demographics were fairly reflective of the denomination as a whole.

What environmental actions did you find churches are the most excited about?

Seventy-one percent of parishes said they're engaged in "general stewardship (recycling, CFL lightbulbs, non-disposable coffee mugs, etc.)." It's exciting to see that most churches are willing to take at least small steps.

Forty-two percent of parishes said they regularly include the environment in existing outreach and justice ministries. However, when asked what inspires them to do environmental work, "environmental justice" actually came in last. I assume this means churches simply don't understand the links between the environment, poverty, and racism.

Next on the list was getting outdoors, with 40 percent of churches saying they do it regularly.

How often do congregants hear about climate change in sermons?

Only 34 percent of churches said the environment is frequently part of their sermons, yet most also said that their parishioners understand the connection between faith and the environment. This prompts a question: Where would most people have learned about that connection if not from their pastors? To that end, other research I've seen shows that most volunteer-led environmental ministries begin after receiving theological encouragement from the pulpit.

What are the challenges churches report facing in trying to do more of this work?

Fifty-eight percent of churches said they face "too many other competing events, demands, or priorities." An overlapping 58 percent also reported some form of "survival mode," meaning they selected at least one of three other options: "not enough lay leaders or volunteers," "not enough active members," and/or "financial/budgetary challenges." Basically, "being green" is seen as just one more thing to do at a time when churches already feel strapped.

In your presentations, you make a distinction between viewing environmental action as a “lens” and seeing it as an “issue.” What is the difference, and why would we want to see a shift to environment as lens?

From our food to our building materials, everything comes from the environment, and from public health to racism and poverty, every issue is impacted by climate change. That means the environment has to be *how* we look at the world, not *what* we look at—a lens on other issues.

Asked if the environment is a part of other issues, 76 percent of churches say it is, but I’m not sure we’ve taken that message to heart. Fifty-eight percent of churches say there are competing priorities, but if the environment is a part of every priority, what’s the competition?

We don’t need “green teams.” Creation care can simply be part of all the things we’re already doing, from maintenance to Sunday School to serving local food and less meat at parish events.

To what extent do churches avoid talking about the environment because of the politics involved?

To my surprise, only 21 percent of churches said “The environment is seen as political and we want to avoid controversy.” Perhaps some clergy object to specific political activities, like contacting Congress, but they understand they can still lead nature walks or install solar panels. Perhaps some are willing to talk about nature generally, but not climate change specifically. Or maybe politics really isn’t the issue after all!

This survey was only of Episcopal churches. Do you think its findings can be relevant for other denominations?

Absolutely. The Episcopal Church is similar in culture and theology to other mainline Protestant denominations, which also face “survival mode.” I know our worship in Episcopal churches reminds many people of the Roman Catholic Church as well.

Moving beyond the survey, the political dynamics around climate change seem like a frustrating stalemate to many people. Is society as stuck as we seem?

Gallup recently found that two-thirds of Americans understand the globe is warming because of human activity. It’s not society that’s stuck—it’s our system. Americans are ready for action on climate change, but we won’t see that action until we deal with gerrymandering, fossil-fuel money in politics, antiquated models of representation, and attacks on minority voting rights. It’s up to the people to make sure those systems change. And even after working in Washington, D.C. for years, I still have hope.

What role can churches play in addressing this challenge and galvanizing society-wide – even global – action?

My survey asked what motivates people to do this work. Seventy-four percent said they want to care for God’s creation, and 62 percent said they want to connect to God through nature. In other

words, people are inspired by the beauty of creation, and by the desire to connect to something larger than themselves. That kind of connection, as well as the hope of the resurrection, are powerful things the church can offer.

The Episcopal Church is 49 percent Democratic and 39 percent Republican – and despite those differences, we’re still worshipping together. We’re still talking. Church can be a place where we have important and hard conversations about the moral issues facing society. It’s when we have those personal conversations that things start to change.

You launched and continue to operate Episcopal Climate News. Tell us about that project.

Even if creation-care ministries aren’t typical, there are still a lot of them! In the Episcopal Church alone, official delegations have gone to U.N. climate conferences, our General Convention has passed dozens of environmental resolutions, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants have gone to local projects. Our Church Pension Fund just invested \$40 million in clean-energy infrastructure.

Episcopal Climate News tries to bring all these stories into one place, highlighting the spiritual and social-justice sides of climate change. We also share scientific and mainstream news articles to help keep the church informed. In just under a year, we’ve gotten more than 2,300 “likes”! Check us out at episcopalclimatenews.com/ ([link is external](#)) or facebook.com/EpiscopalClimateNews/ ([link is external](#))

What do you plan on doing after graduation?

Sleep and play video games. Oh, sorry, you meant after that!

God willing, I’ll be ordained a priest in June. Before I came to Yale, I worked as an online organizer for progressive causes. I’m going to continue that work, but now from a faith-based perspective, running campaigns for a small advocacy non-profit. I’ll also work as a parish priest part-time.

<https://divinity.yale.edu/news/connecting-environment-and-church-nathan-empsall-19-mdiv>

April 8, 2019

Amazon synod to take on land use, biodiversity, indigenous rights

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

In the fall, a special Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian region will mark the Catholic Church's most serious reentry into the ecological arena since Francis issued "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" nearly four years ago.

The synod, to be held Oct. 6-27 in Rome and themed "[Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology](#)," will examine evangelical approaches in the region and "the cause of the crisis of the Amazonian forest, lung of fundamental importance for our planet," in Pope Francis' words.

Vatican observers expect the issue of married priests to come up and grab headlines at the synod, as when Francis has spoken of that possibility it's often been in relation to difficulties ministering in remote parts of the rainforest.

But the synod's [preparatory document](#) makes clear that central issues will focus on land use, biodiversity and rights of indigenous people. The region spans 2.1 million square miles across nine countries, is home to 33 million people — of them, 3 million indigenous people representing 400 different tribes — and is the source of one-fifth of the world's fresh water, one-fourth of all oxygen and more than one-third of global forest reserves.

"In the Amazon rainforest, which is of vital importance for the planet, a deep crisis has been triggered by prolonged human intervention, in which a 'culture of waste' and an extractivist mentality prevail," the preparatory document stated, quoting *Laudato Si'*. "The Amazon is a region with rich biodiversity; it is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious; it is a mirror of all humanity which, in defense of life, requires structural and personal changes by all human beings, by nations, and by the Church."

The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, or [REPAM](#), formed in 2014 in response to Francis' concerns facing the region. The network, which covers the nine countries of the Amazon, has played a central role ahead of the synod, including at a [recent conference](#) at Georgetown University.

REPAM told NCR in an email that through the synod the pope is inviting the church toward two conversions: one pastoral, in the need to respond to the throwaway culture, and the other a social and environmental conversion as expressed in *Laudato Si'*.

In an [interview with Vatican News](#), Mauricio López, REPAM executive secretary, said that attention on the environment "is not is not something that came up because it's trendy or because it's something that at this moment in time it will be eloquent to speak about. It is part of the social teaching of the church. If we want to follow the teachings of the church, we need to respond to the appeal of a serious pastoral change, social-environmental change."

López, who is the lone layperson on the 18-member synod council, added that the synod will represent a "kairos" moment for the church not only in Latin America, but across the globe.

"One out of four breaths every person in this world takes is thanks to the Amazon. So when they say, 'This has nothing to do with me,' we need to think about it and, yes, think it over," he told Vatican News.

In the run-up to the synod, REPAM has held roughly 260 "territorial assemblies" to bring people together to discuss themes around the Amazon, among them: indigenous people, frontier lines, isolated populations, communications, socio-environmental justice and human rights.

REPAM estimated about 22,000 people participated through the territorial assemblies, and that roughly 80,000 people overall engaged through parish and community events.

Lopez in the Vatican News interview stated that "the future of the world relies on how we respond and respect and defend not only the Amazon, but also the Congo Basin, the Asia-Pacific tropical forest and Central America."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/amazon-synod-take-land-use-biodiversity-indigenous-rights>

April 8, 2019

Where science warnings fail, can moral force push us out of climate inertia?

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The world today is filled with the reality and repercussions of a changing climate.

Glaciers are melting. Intense storms are strengthening. Seas are rising. Floods are spreading. Heat waves and droughts are prolonging. And the destruction and disruption all those events bring to people in all parts of the globe are increasing.

For decades, science has signaled this was the world to come as humans pump more and more heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, a consequential byproduct of industrializing nations on the back of fossil fuels. Yet despite the increasingly dire forecasts of even greater devastation ahead if current warming rates continue, scientists emphasize that time, albeit limited, remains to curtail such a future. But to do so would take a historic display of rapid action, economic transformation and international cooperation.

So far, science alone has not been able to provide the spark to overcome political inertia that has resisted such massive change. More and more, a prevailing belief is that a moral force is needed.

Into that space, Pope Francis introduced nearly four years ago his [landmark encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home,"](#) a compendium of Catholic teaching and thought on creation and humanity's role within it. With it, he outlined in unequivocal terms the essential duty to care for nature at the core of what it means to be Christian, and positioned the global Catholic Church as a prominent voice on climate change and environmental degradation that face populations across the planet.

In the time since, the world has continued to warm at a historic and dangerous pace.

Each of the last four years [together stand](#) as the four hottest years on record. Pull back farther, the world's 20 warmest years recorded have [all occurred in the past 22 years](#). In October, the United Nations climate science body issued a report that the planet, already 1 degrees Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than pre-industrial times, is [on track to reach 1.5 C of warming by 2040](#), and as soon as a decade earlier. The rate of warming seen since the middle of the 20th century far eclipses what the planet has experienced in ages, or [as NASA states](#), "unprecedented over decades to millennia."

Months after *Laudato Si'* was issued, world leaders [adopted the Paris Agreement](#) as the first global pact obligating all nations to work to stem warming below the 1.5 threshold. And while every country has now joined that climate accord — with the United States alone in expressing [plans to exit](#) — emissions rose in each of the last two years, and national climate plans only stand to limit the planet to 3 C warming by the end of the century.

Francis addressed his encyclical as an appeal to "the whole human family," requesting "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet." He called not only for conversation but ultimately conversion and action to better care for a common earthly home that "is falling into serious disrepair." And in the case of climate change, address "an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced."

The impact of the encyclical can be seen throughout the church. It has served for many as an awakening to Catholic teaching on creation care, and why the church cares about what gases enter the atmosphere. For others, it fortified and recharged ministries begun decades ago to address environmental degradation and serve those people most impacted.

Despite all that energy, there's still a feeling, with scientific forecasts firmly in mind, that the church has the potential to do more in how the world responds to climate change.

Perhaps a lot more.

"There's a lot of education that needs to happen still," said Dan Misleh, executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, which has driven much of the encyclical's implementation in the United States. "*Laudato Si'* has been out there for going on four years, but there's still not enough Catholics or Catholic leaders who are paying attention to this."

Francis himself offered somewhat of a stock take in [remarks](#) at an early March interreligious Vatican [conference](#) in support of the United Nations' [sustainable development goals](#), adopted three months after his encyclical's release.

"After three and a half years since the adoption of the sustainable development goals, we must be even more acutely aware of the importance of accelerating and adapting our actions in responding adequately to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor — they are connected," he said.

Making creation care essential

Nine days after the encyclical reaches the four-year mark, Catholic Climate Covenant will gather approximately 250 leaders from various ministries to Middle America — Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska — with the goal "to try to jump-start" a deeper integration of creation care into what it means to be Catholic, Misleh told NCR. Or put another way: "Weaving a green thread through the tapestry of the Catholic Church."

"We're trying to help people in liturgy, education, facilities management, advocacy ... think through how they talk about environmental questions, and how we can share Catholic teaching on the environment more broadly through these ministries," the Catholic Climate Covenant director said.

The [conference](#), June 27-29, will be the first of three such gatherings, with follow-ups in 2021 and 2023. San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy will deliver the opening keynote address, and Adrian Dominican Sr. [Patricia Siemen](#) is set to close the event.

In between speeches, ministry-specific breakout sessions will look at the challenges facing them and aim to develop resources and initiatives that can be taken home to then implement toward making creation care more essential to the Catholic faith.

That's not to say the encyclical hasn't planted any seeds.

The pope himself [declared](#) Sept. 1 a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and invited Catholics to recognize the Season of Creation throughout that month. He proposed "care for our common home" as an addition to the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

More than 650 Catholic organizations worldwide have joined the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#), itself [formed](#) in anticipation of the encyclical.

The church in the [Philippines](#) has emerged a leader on environmental issues, motivated in no small part by devastatingly stronger storms fueled by higher, warmer seas. The Jesuit order made "caring for our common home" one of their four priorities for the next decade. An Indian archbishop urged Catholics to [ditch plastic bags](#). A [Laudato Si' Observatory](#) was established in Costa Rica.

The bishops of coal-rich Poland [issued a pastoral letter](#) on the dangers of air pollution. U.N. diplomats and other policymakers continue to cite the encyclical. More than 120 Catholic organizations worldwide have publicly committed to [divesting](#) their finances from fossil fuels, including Caritas Internationalis and the bishops of Austria, Belgium and Ireland.

In the U.S., nearly 800 Catholic institutions — a mix of dioceses, religious orders, colleges, hospitals, parishes and nonprofits — have signed onto the [Catholic Climate Declaration](#), pledging to pursue the Paris Agreement goals absent presidential leadership. The Catholic Climate Movement and U.S. bishops' domestic justice committee, among others, have lobbied for [climate](#) and [environmental health](#) policies.

Dioceses and parishes have installed solar panels and examined energy usage. The church in Vermont [held a Year of Creation](#). Hundreds of parish creation care teams have formed, some existing long before the encyclical. [Religious sisters](#) and [Catholic Workers](#) have worked to block oil and gas pipelines.

Catholic academics created a [free online textbook](#) integrating environmental science, ethics and theology, and universities have held countless conferences. Catholics are [getting offline and outdoors](#) in Wisconsin.

Even as the U.S. church has made strides, the sense is that Catholic engagement on climate change, and environmental issues more broadly, has been more piecemeal than prevalent. That despite seeds planted, it has yet to take root and rise to the level of prominence that Francis saw his encyclical achieving, to "help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face."

"We are theologically still very narrow when it comes to reconceiving the human person within the wider realm of creation," said Franciscan Sr. [Ilia Delio](#), a theologian at Villanova University who has studied extensively the integration of religion and science.

While there have been many good books, papers and academic panels, she said she sees little theological change stemming from *Laudato Si'*, or other church documents on the environment, so far.

"I see no real movement. I see a lot of good people and there's a lot of goodwill, but we are heading towards a very, very different world, a world that will bear the consequences of global warming," she told NCR. "And that's just our current reality."

Part of the issue Delio sees is that the church has yet to fully embrace evolution theologically and, with it, how the human person is seen and understood in a world of dynamic change and complexity.

Addressing moral theologians at the Vatican in February, Francis encouraged them [to delve deeper into environmental responsibility](#). Noting that he has rarely heard confessions about polluting or harming the Earth, he added: "We still aren't conscious of this sin."

Catholic Climate Covenant has worked to educate and familiarize priests with church teachings on creation — from 13th-century Sts. Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure to more recently in the papacies of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis — so that they feel more comfortable and competent in preaching on the topic. The organization has also created homily helps to identify ecological themes throughout the liturgical year.

But Delio said the reliance on theological classics like Augustine and Aquinas has, in a way, marginalized more modern thinkers, like Jesuit Fr. [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#) and Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry. To Delio, that has prevented the church from theologically taking on evolution and understanding nature from the dynamics of changing complexity she says is necessary to arrive at the worldview Francis holds up in the encyclical.

"We can't keep relying on medieval philosophies and theologies to do theology in the 21st century," she said. "We need to really do what science does, and that is shift paradigms. And we haven't done that."

'A lack of urgency and a lack of prioritization'

Two studies this year seek a better sense of the U.S. church's embrace, or lack thereof, of *Laudato Si'*. One survey has begun asking parishes nationwide how they have responded to the encyclical. Later this summer, a second study will examine how bishops have talked about the encyclical or climate change.

"People are obviously working with the encyclical and they're trying to incorporate it into parish life. So that's good," said Dan DiLeo, a consultant to Catholic Climate Covenant and director of Creighton's Justice and Peace Studies Program, who is leading the studies. "What has come through again and again [in the early parish survey results] is a lack of urgency and a lack of prioritization."

"It's kind of ancillary, and optional at best," he added.

In its initial 24 hours, the parish survey received roughly 800 responses. Of those reporting little environmental activity at their parish, parishioners said their priest doesn't prioritize the issue. Priests, in turn, said their bishops didn't emphasize ecological concern or, to bring things full circle, that their parishioners hadn't registered creation care as important to them.

An early takeaway from the initial round of data, DiLeo said, is "that it emphasizes the need for the entire church to be prophetic on the issue. That it's all the above — it's priests, it's bishops, it's laity."

At their November 2018 meeting, the U.S. bishops were expected to discuss, and perhaps vote on, joining the Catholic Climate Declaration.

But neither happened.

The re-emergence of the church's sexual abuse scandal upended most of the agenda. Still, had the bishops voted to sign their names, which was not a certainty, it would have come five months after the majority of Catholic institutions had signed on, and two months after those signatures were officially joined to a wider [We Are Still In coalition](#) pledging to reduce greenhouse gas emissions no matter the effort coming from the White House.

The situation served as an illustration that, more often, it has been the church outside the hierarchy — [women religious](#), schools and development agencies, among others — leading the way on issues concerning the environment.

"Women religious have been out front on this for decades," DiLeo said.

Of the Catholic groups that have divested from fossil fuels, almost one-fifth have been congregations or orders of women religious. More than 150 of the signers to the Catholic Climate Declaration were communities of Catholic sisters.

Last June, the International Union of Superiors General launched an initiative aimed specifically at putting *Laudato Si'* into practice even further. Titled "[Sowing Hope for the Planet](#)," the two-year campaign "offers a practical and spiritual platform for solutions that are so desperately needed right now," said Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary of the organization's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission.

"Through this campaign we have the opportunity to organize the voice of the Sisters in the effort on many levels of structures in order to enhance and recognize our contribution to the care of our Common Home," she told NCR in an email.

In March, another survey began tracking how many congregations participated in the initiative and how they did so. Results will be shared at the International Union of Superiors General plenary in Rome in May. Early responses found sisters developing resources for parents, teachers and catechists; incorporating the encyclical into liturgies; offsetting carbon footprints by supporting development projects in Africa; and undertaking a variety of planting projects to promote biodiversity and reduce emissions.

Kinsey said the May plenary is expected to also produce a statement to determine the campaign's future direction.

Along with Catholic sisters, the church's development organizations have been working with communities across the globe in dealing with and adapting to the present-day effects of climate change.

In the Philippines, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, that has typically meant responding to the aftermath of devastating storms. In Central America and Africa, often they have addressed the impacts of deforestation and drought, combating the former to better withstand the latter through restoring the soil and watersheds.

"We're really feeling it on the frontlines with those communities who are facing the disasters," said Lori Pearson, senior policy adviser on food security, agriculture and climate change for [Catholic Relief Services](#), the U.S. bishops' international development agency.

She told NCR that *Laudato Si'* has been particularly inspirational to CRS and other development organizations within [Caritas Internationalis](#). "It's such an articulation of what we are seeing on the ground, and then [Francis] brought it to this higher level and it's becoming a call to the church."

In October, the Catholic Church will give perhaps the greatest attention to environmental concern since *Laudato Si'* with the special [synod on the Amazon](#) — a critical ecosystem for the planet where issues of land use, indigenous rights, water access and sustainability all intertwine.

The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, or [REPAM](#), has led much of the pre-synod preparations, while groups like Global Catholic Climate Movement have ramped up their focus on the South American rainforest. Pearson said that a *Laudato Si'* working group within Caritas has also increased its attention on the Amazon ahead of the synod.

"I think this will be very significant," she said.

The political barrier

Any conversation about the Catholic Church and the environment is bound to turn to the massive potential the church has to be a major force for good on the issue. They cite the size of the church and its global reach, the thousands of buildings and properties it owns (more than 70,000 in the U.S. alone) and the influence it possesses, even amid present scandals.

So, how to turn that potential into higher levels of action?

"That's the million-dollar question," said DiLeo, the Creighton theologian.

Appreciating the gravity of what the science is saying is a first step, he said. A second is greater recognition and understanding of the idea of integral ecology — an entire chapter in *Laudato Si'* — that climate change and ecological issues touch on every sector of public life and every ethical issue concerning the church.

Delio, the Villanova theologian, said that while the encyclical has raised the bar of consciousness on creation theology, what's needed is a coherent theology "that can filter out of the academy into the pew" that can process the big ideas *Laudato Si'* raises into what it means in people's daily lives.

"If we want a real change, a green Earth, we need to get practical. We need practical theology. Theology that translates into people's lives, and we need principles and language to help do that," she said.

Delio suggested the Gospels as a starting point, taking values expressed there — community, attentiveness, compassion and that God's love extends to all creation — and then examining them through the lens of evolution.

"The type of change that's needed cannot be cosmetic. It's not an intellectual change. It's not a cosmetic change. It's a deep ontological change in the sense, in the way we understand what we are as human persons, what we are within this wider realm of creation and how God may be acting in this dynamic flow of created life," Delio said.

The parish surveys DiLeo has reviewed so far confirm a readily apparent barrier to the church in America raising the moral and ethical rationale for addressing a warming planet:

Politics.

That reality raises the question, DiLeo said, "about whether church leaders are willing to be prophetic in the face of what you might call anticipated resistance."

Francis regularly acknowledged his intention for the encyclical to influence negotiations at the United Nations [climate summit in Paris that year](#). Since then, the political scene has changed dramatically.

President Donald Trump has stated he will withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement at the earliest date — Nov. 4, 2020, a day after the next presidential election — which would place the greatest contributor to historical carbon emissions out of step with the rest of the world. The rise in nationalist sentiments has led other countries, like Brazil, to question their commitments to reducing emissions while doubling down on drilling, mining and logging.

The Vatican delegation at [COP24](#), the 2018 U.N. climate summit, concluded the global leaders there "struggled to find the will to set aside their short-term economic and political interests and work for the common good."

While commending the completion of a rulebook to implement the Paris Agreement, the Vatican said it "does not adequately reflect the urgency necessary to tackle climate change, which 'represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day' " — quoting *Laudato Si'*.

At the same time, the climate issue has amplified in America in 2019, in no small part to the ongoing debate around the [Green New Deal](#). The nonbinding congressional resolution stakes out ambitious goals to make the United States carbon-neutral by 2030 and transform its energy grid away from fossil fuels, while also addressing "systemic injustices" in labor, wages, race, housing and health.

While conservatives and even some Democrats have dismissed the Green New Deal as unrealistic or too radical, it nonetheless represents the most substantial conversation on climate change in Congress since the failed cap-and-trade bill nine years ago.

House Democrats have held [more than a dozen hearings on climate change](#) so far. And early indications are that climate change could be a prominent issue in the Democratic presidential primaries. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other Catholic groups lent support to a climate-fee-and-dividend bill in the House, though they have refrained from any public position on the Green New Deal.

Among the Green New Deal's proposals is a call for "a just transition for all communities and workers" as the country moves toward net-zero emissions. Since 2010, more than half of the 530 U.S. coal-fired power plants — [and 95 within the last four years](#) — have announced plans to close. While representing progress of a world less reliant on fossil fuels, it raises uncertainty for the [communities](#) and workers whose lives, finances and culture developed around [extractive industries](#).

The topic of a just transition initiated last summer the beginning of a series of meetings between Franciscan Action Network, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Creation Justice

Ministries, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Edison Electric Institute, an association representing many of the nation's power companies.

"We actually talked about *Laudato Si'* in one of our meetings," said Patrick Carolan, Franciscan Action Network executive director, who also passed out copies of the encyclical.

To him, the meetings reflect the dialogue Francis requested through the papal document.

"We have to build these relationships. These are people who provide the electricity; we have to be in the room having discussions with them, to try to help shape policy with them. ... If we don't start doing all of that, then we're going to keep spinning our wheels," he said.

In the encyclical, the pope asked the people of the planet to not just consider questions of what type of world they want children to grow up in, what they want to leave behind for future generations, but to "struggle with these deeper issues" and others about what is the purpose of our life in this world.

At stake in those deliberations, Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'* Paragraph 160, "is our own dignity."

"Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.

"Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/where-science-warnings-fail-can-moral-force-push-us-out-climate-inertia>

April 8, 2019

Farmers benefit from organic farming initiated by sisters

By Joachim Pham
Global Sisters Report

Mary Tran Thi Thu is busy every day watering, weeding, hoeing and fertilizing vegetable beds on her 3,000-square-yard farm.

Thu, 52, uses traps to kill insects and butterflies at night and catches caterpillars by hand to keep them from feeding on crops.

She makes organic fertilizers by mixing pig feces with dry leaves, rice stubble, husk and lime before composting them.

She said she sells some 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of Malabar spinach, snow peas, okra, amaranth, centella asiatica, houttuynia, gourds, sweet potato and mushrooms to local people and nursery schools every day. Her vegetables cost from 6,000 to 12,000 dong (25-50 cents) per kilogram.

"People prefer our organic produce because we do not use pesticides and artificial fertilizers for vegetables," she says.

"We are happy that we have paid off 25 million dong (\$1,100) we borrowed from the bank to build our house in the past," Thu says.

"As Catholics, we grow fresh organic produce for the common good rather than private interests," she says, adding they have to work harder than other farmers in the area who use chemicals to plant vegetables for retail clients.

She also raises poultry and pigs and feeds them rice, cassava powder (similar to tapioca), trunk pieces from the banana tree and vegetables. She sells a dozen pigs a year.

Thu is among 40 farmers who provide clean vegetables for local nursery schools. They are from Thanh Trung Parish in Quang Dien District of Thua Thien Hue Province.

Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation Sr. Mary Elizabeth Duong Thu Huong, who established the group in 2015, said those farmers "aim to grow vegetables, roots, beans and fruits without use of insecticides and chemicals to protect the environment from being polluted by pesticides and to look after people's health."

Huong said she teaches them how to make natural fertilizers from mud, leaves, garbage and animal excrement, trap insects and choose vegetables suitable for the weather and soils in the area.

Vietnam uses [100,000 metric tons](#) of herbicides and pesticides for agriculture per year, Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Nguyen Xuan Cuong reported last May. Farmers [rampantly abuse pesticides](#) and herbicides, creating an imbalance in the ecology and poisoning water sources and soils.

In 2018, the country recorded some [164,670 new cases of cancer](#) and 114,870 cancer deaths, according to the GLOBOCAN database of cancer mortalities in the world. One of the leading causes of cancers is contaminated food from the overuse of chemicals.

Filles de Marie Immaculée Sr. Marie Nguyen Thi Hiep from Phuong Tay convent says her congregation also offers local women ways of growing vegetables in plastic or foam barrels in places affected by climate change.

"We also ask benefactors to offer capital to 20 local households, 5 million dong [\$215] each, to raise poultry and cattle and grow vegetables for a living," she says.

Filles de Marie Immaculée Sr. Mary Tran Thi Hien, who gathered 26 farmers to grow clean vegetables at Xuan Thien Parish in 2014, says at first she encouraged them to follow traditional organic farming methods by giving each household vegetables seeds and two piglets.

Hien says local farmers make a meager living so, when they have bad harvests, they get into debt, leaving homes and farms to collect used items and work at construction sites for a living.

"Many people improve their life, thanks to organic produce that consumers love to buy," she says. They provide organically farmed produce, poultry and pork products for Catholic nurseries and local people.

"Once people are aware of making clean agricultural products, they will be aware of taking responsibility for protecting community health," Hien says.

She says many people abuse chemicals and pesticides because they are not educated on the ill effects chemicals have on human health and the environment, and focus on chasing immediate profits.

She says the Filles de Marie Immaculée, also known as the Marianist sisters, have trained 17 parishes in cultivating organic vegetables, preserving food well, providing drinking water for others and preventing them from illnesses caused by climate change.

Hien says that sisters in rural areas grow clean vegetables in convent compounds for their own needs while religious communities in cities do not have enough room to do so.

Sr. Mary Nguyen Thi Thuan from the Mary Queen of Peace Congregation, based in Buon Ma Thuot City, Dak Lak Province, says sisters grow vegetables in farms around their convents to provide food for themselves and sell 100 kilograms (220 pounds) or more of vegetables a day to shops and local people.

Thuan says they also supply clean vegetables to a business in Ho Chi Minh City.

"Some local farmers visit our farms, learn how to do organic farming and apply organic methods to their own farms," she said. "People are interested in organic farming methods."

James Dang Thanh Hoa, from Xuan Thien Parish, says he grows organic vegetables to safeguard the health of his family and others.

Hoa says he harvests 150 kilograms (330 pounds) of vegetables per day and does not have enough produce to provide to local shops, markets or malls, which require more massive amounts.

"We are happy that more and more people from other places come to buy our fresh farm produce," he said.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for Global Sisters Report based in Vietnam.]

April 10, 2019

The Renegade Nuns Who Took On a Pipeline

By Eliza Griswold
The New Yorker

On a crisp October morning in 2017, Sister Sara Dwyer, a sixty-eight-year-old nun wearing a red T-shirt that read “*YOU WILL NOT SPOIL OUR LAND*,” led three elderly nuns and seventy other protesters onto an industrial work site in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Many carried red banners stencilled with wheat sheaves. They were there to protest Williams, an Oklahoma-based pipeline company that was trying to build the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline, a two-hundred-mile natural gas pipeline that would carry shale gas from fields in northeastern Pennsylvania to the coast, where the fuel could be shipped abroad. The company was trying to lay the line under a cornfield belonging to the nuns, and the sisters had decided to fight back, hoping that they might draw attention to the issue of climate change. “Just being in resistance is not the goal,” Dwyer told me. “The goal is spiritual conversion.” As the protesters entered the work site, Malinda Clatterbuck, who had helped plan the event with the sisters, reminded the participants, “This is a nonviolent protest in all ways. We’re not going to yell or speak to the workers.” She walked around asking each person to nod in agreement. “If you’re angry today, go home and come back to an action once you’re in a better place,” she said.

One of the organizers passed a Sharpie around and wrote the phone number for a jail-support team on the protesters’ arms, in case they were arrested. Then they walked onto a bed of turned-up earth in the middle of the site, where construction had begun. The protesters had named the action “Bread and Nuns”; as they arrived, children fanned out, offering loaves of locally made wheat-and-oatmeal bread to the pipeline workers. The adults formed a circle and sang “Amazing Grace.” Then Dwyer led the group in a prayer from “Laudato Si’,” the Catholic Church’s statement on climate change, issued by Pope Francis in 2015, which revolutionized the Church’s public position regarding the environment, calling on Christians to take action to protect the earth. “All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures,” it begins.

Dwyer belongs to an international Catholic congregation of nuns called the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, which was founded in Italy, in 1834, by a woman who was later declared a saint. The Adorers now have twelve hundred members worldwide, who live in countries including Liberia, where, in 1992, five nuns were killed during a civil war, and Guatemala. Sixteen nuns live in Lancaster County, near a seventy-acre plot of land that they have owned for more than a century, where the pipeline was being laid. They once farmed tobacco and raised sheep.

The nuns see protecting the earth as part of their religious duty, which separates them from much historical Catholic teaching. Christians, drawing on wording from the Book of Genesis, have traditionally seen man as having “dominion” over the earth: all other living things were created for his use. The Adorers are calling for an end to the theology of human supremacy, and for a deeper understanding of creation’s interdependency. They were influenced by the work of [Thomas Merton](#), a Trappist monk and poet who, in the early twentieth century, became known for locating religious belief in the natural world. “What Merton did, and in a big way, was invigorate Catholics’ sense of the natural world—pasture, knoll, woods, shore, desert, mountain fastness—as a locus for spirituality,” [Paul Elie](#), a senior fellow at Georgetown and the author of “[The Life You Save May Be Your Own](#),” told me. In the nineteen-seventies, as the secular environmental movement grew, the American theologian Thomas Berry called on Catholics to make a more active commitment to protecting the earth in the name of God. “This, then, is our challenge—,” Berry wrote, “to move from a purely human-oriented or personal-salvation focus in our religious concerns to one that embraces the universe in all its forms.” In 2005, the Adorers adopted a Land Ethic that affirmed their belief in the sacredness of creation. “As students of Earth, we listen intently to Earth’s wisdom; we respect our interconnectedness and oneness with creation and learn what Earth needs to support life,” it reads.

The Adorers learned in 2015 that Williams planned to claim eminent domain in order to build the pipeline on their land. The congregation soon met the Clatterbucks—Malinda, her husband Mark, and their teen-age children, Ashton and Hannah—who had recently started a resistance group called Lancaster Against Pipelines, and were going door to door along the pipeline route, alerting people. They sent Dwyer, who lives in Washington, D.C., and serves as the congregation’s liaison on “justice, peace, and integrity of creation,” to meet with the group, and she was impressed. “I think the Clatterbucks—Malinda, Mark, Ashton, and Hannah—are the religious leaders of our day,” Dwyer told me.

The sisters joined the protest and, in the summer of 2017, filed a lawsuit to block the company from laying the pipeline through their land, on the grounds that it went against their religious beliefs. That fall, a federal court ruled against the nuns, and, soon after, they lost on appeal. So, last September, they petitioned the Supreme Court to hear their case. The Adorers argued that their rights were protected under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, from 1993, which has recently been invoked in several high-profile cases. In 2014, the owners of Hobby Lobby won a Supreme Court case in which they argued that being forced to offer employees birth control violated their religious liberties; four years later, the Court also sided with a baker in Colorado who refused to make a cake for a gay wedding. Cases on religious liberty have tended to reinforce conservative values, but the Adorers hoped that their beliefs would also be protected. “The Adorers agree with Pope Francis’s teachings that the threat of climate change, caused in large part by the intensive use of fossil fuels, represents a principal challenge facing humanity,” they wrote, in a court filing.

While their case wended its way through the courts, they continued protesting. In July, 2017, they built an open-air chapel on their land, along the proposed route of the pipeline, to block construction. It consisted of an arbor, an altar made of a tree trunk, and a dozen wooden pews, and they named it the Cornfield Chapel. They held morning and evening services there, trudging up to the cornfield with their canes and walkers, sometimes in cold rain or by flashlight. They

hoped that, through their services, they would help people understand the religious significance of the environment, and that this, as much as opposing abortion, was a pro-life issue. “People often see pro-life in terms of pro-birth,” Dwyer told me. “But all the elements that go into protecting life—clean water, clean air, good soil—go into protecting the earth.”

One chilly evening, at their ranch house in the woods, Mark and Malinda Clatterbuck, the activists helping the nuns fight the pipeline, called a small meeting of four other members of Lancaster Against Pipelines. The Clatterbucks live in a remote part of the county, and many of their neighbors are Amish or conservative Mennonites. On my way to their home, I encountered a horse and buggy driven by a young Amish man, who smiled as I passed. When I arrived, Malinda was preparing for the visitors by pulling a vegan orange chocolate-chip Bundt cake out of the oven. Ashton, Hannah, and Mark, who is a forty-seven-year-old professor of religion, were clearing the table from dinner and putting dishes into the sink. A pocket copy of the U.S. Constitution sat on the dining-room table, near bundles of white sage. “We’re not organizers,” Malinda said. “We’re just people.”

Malinda is a tenth-generation Mennonite in Lancaster County, and currently lives in the house where she grew up. She had a difficult childhood: her stepmother physically abused her between the ages of six and seventeen, forcing her at one point to eat spiders. “I had a bloody nose nearly every day,” she said. Left alone much of the time, she read her King James Bible and played in the forest. “We were so isolated in the woods that our only friends were trees and squirrels. The only place I had refuge and was safe was in the natural world.” Malinda was a seeker: at ten, she became a conservative evangelical during summer camp. In her twenties, she met Mark, a Pentecostal, and moved with him to lead a church on the Rocky Boy’s Reservation, in Montana, which is home to the Chippewa Cree community. But the Clatterbucks grew disillusioned with the Church’s oppressive history among Native peoples and left after two years. They joined a Catholic Church in Wichita, Kansas, and then, after questioning the Church’s position on women and L.G.B.T.Q. rights, moved to an Episcopal congregation. Finally, they returned to Lancaster County, and rejoined the Mennonite tradition of Malinda’s childhood, which is generally conservative on social issues, but more progressive on protecting the environment. (The Clatterbucks attend a local church that is socially progressive as well.) “The Mennonite Church has always been concerned about things like how soil is used, since it’s mostly made up of farmers,” she told me. On a national level, the Mennonite Church has begun emphasizing what it calls “creation care.”

The four other organizers arrived, stamping snow off their hiking shoes. The Clatterbucks had called the meeting to discuss an alarming new legal development. Scott Martin, a state senator who lives two miles down the road, had recently introduced legislation that would render protests, in which people trespassed near pipelines and other “critical infrastructure,” a felony. Of particular concern was the fact that a second new piece of legislation, which would hold protesters accountable for public fees incurred, specifically named “vigils and religious services” as targets, and the Clatterbucks were worried that it was directed at the Adorers. Other states, including Ohio and Wyoming, are considering similar legislation, some of which was written by the American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative organization that often drafts local-legislation language to further corporate interests.

Later, when I spoke to Martin, he told me that he had not intended to single out the nuns. “I’m a good Catholic,” he said. He had drafted the legislation broadly, to avoid the kind of fees incurred in North Dakota, where protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline had cost the state millions of dollars in law enforcement and cleanup. “I always want to tread delicately—and rightfully so—when it might be something treading on First Amendment rights,” he told me. “But I’m encouraging people to think beyond pipelines, and to what we’ve had going on in this country.” He mentioned Baltimore and Ferguson, where protests against police shootings turned violent.

The organizers told me that the group had been trying to keep its protests positive. They held a dance party at a work site during a snowstorm, used kayaks to deliver pizza (which they had termed a “kayaction”), and offered workers homemade cookies while Christmas carolling (after which Mark and Hannah were charged with “trespassing and terrorizing workers”). The proposed legislation frightened them. “South Dakota just passed a law like this,” Mark said. “They’ve even included what they call ‘riot boosting,’ so anyone who supports or encourages or funds protests can be arrested.”

“That’s us right here,” Malinda said, looking around the living room.

The fear tactics didn’t scare the Clatterbucks off. A few weeks later, Ashton, a seventeen-year-old with duct tape holding his sneakers together and a buzz cut, brandished a drawing of the earth with the caption, “I’m with her.” Then he led a procession of fifty-five people from Community Mennonite Church, where his mother is a pastor, for three blocks, to Penn Square, Lancaster’s public gathering place. Ashton is the local high-school leader of the Sunrise Movement, a group of young activists committed to addressing climate change. He was directing a school walkout that was part of a larger movement, in which children refused to stay in school every Friday to protest climate change. In the square, he picked up a bullhorn and climbed onto a marble bench to address the protesters, the majority of whom were kids from five local high schools but also included children as young as two. “We’ve had decades and decades to come up with a solution and nothing’s happened, so we are here, today, demanding it,” Ashton said.

Ashton came to the climate movement at age twelve, when he began helping his parents in their battle over the pipeline. At five o’clock one morning, in October, 2017, Ashton and his parents, and some hundred other protesters, gathered at the nuns’ chapel. The appeals court had just ruled against the nuns, and construction was beginning while they scrambled to put together their next appeal. Ashton and dozens of others surrounded a bright yellow backhoe and sang “Which Side Are You On,” a coal miner’s protest song from the nineteen-thirties, to the tune of a Baptist hymn. He was arrested for trespassing, along with his mother and twenty-one people, and taken to a local police station, where he watched the rest of the protest via Facebook Live on an officer’s phone. The misdemeanor charges against him were dropped, although his mother’s are still pending. The group became known as the Chapel Twenty-Three, and a local symbol of the religious fight against the fossil-fuel industry.

Across almost every religion, there are those who believe that protecting nature is their religious duty. The activist Wen Stephenson told me that, in the U.S., temples, mosques, and churches have offered established networks to mobilize around the issue. In Union Hill, Virginia, Swami Dayananda, a Hindu monk, is helping a group of Baptists to lead a battle against a natural-gas

compressor station. Many conservative Christians are hostile to the idea of global warming, believing that it's hubristic to believe that humans—rather than God—could bring about the end of the world; the apocalypse is preordained, and will be marked by Jesus' return. Matthew Sleeth, an evangelical activist, is trying to convince Christians of the importance of protecting the planet, by using terms that aren't tied to liberal politics, like "stewardship"; his book, "[Reforesting Faith](#)," emphasized the Biblical importance of trees. For some, religion has also been a way to cope with the despair of watching environmental degradation. "One of the primary functions faith communities has served is grieving, and that's what we need to be doing now," Tim DeChristopher, a founder of the climate-disobedience movement and a Unitarian, told me.

In the Global South, where the effects of climate change are already overwhelmingly palpable, religion plays an even more significant role. In 2010, on a trip to northern Nigeria, I met Amin al-Amin, an Islamic educator, who was attempting to counter the belief, held in many conservative communities, that extreme drought was caused by sin. He spread the message that humans were largely responsible for warming weather, which was frequently met with hostility. Once, after conservative clerics threw stones at him, Amin told me the story of the Prophet Muhammad's visit to Taif, when he was stoned for preaching the truth to unwilling listeners.

Although Ashton grew up as a pastor's kid, he doesn't consider himself religious. "I'm not Christian in the traditional sense," he told me. "I don't believe that Jesus' blood saved me from my sins." But he still sees the fight for the climate as a spiritual struggle, a conviction he came to when he visited the Standing Rock protests, in 2016. "I see this fight as my duty as a human on this earth, and as being part of the interconnectedness of humanity," he told me.

At the rally in Lancaster, Ashton emphasized the damage that climate change would bring. "We've already seen the disasters," Ashton said. "The insane fires this year in California, [Louisiana losing ground every minute](#), because of the sea level rising." At the edge of the crowd, an apocalyptic street preacher who regularly rants in the square about the end times looked on with irritation at the sudden competition. "Climate change isn't going to end the world," the preacher shouted back. "God is!"

Mark, who was attending the rally, approached the man to try to calm him. "Why are you trying to drown them out? The kid who's organizing this, his mom is also a pastor," he said. "For many of these students here, this is an issue of faith."

"God's going to burn it all up anyway," the preacher replied.

On a recent afternoon, I went to visit the Adorers at one of their residences in Lancaster County. Sister Bernice Klostermann, a bespectacled nun in her late seventies, and five other sisters gathered around a wooden table in a room that was once the farm's stable, and offered me homemade gingersnaps and Diet Coke. Klostermann was the youngest nun there; the rest were well over eighty. "We're about to pick up our wings and halos," she said. The other sisters laughed. "We're not just fighting for ourselves," Klostermann told me. "We're fighting for the future."

Klostermann handed me a stack of black-and-white photographs of their foremothers working the land. In one, three nuns, clad in heavy habits, hoed a field of tobacco. In another, a sister drove a tractor, her wimple fluttering behind her. The nuns no longer wear habits. When I met them, most kept their snowy white hair sensibly short, and all of them wore silver-colored hearts around their neck, a symbol of the Adorers worldwide. “They used to be gold,” one sister told me, but the nuns decided that it was strange to minister to the poor while wearing such an expensive metal.

The sisters weren’t new to taking part in resistance movements. In Guatemala, some of their fellow Adorers had protested against gold mining, which damages indigenous communities and the land. Sister Helene Trueitt, who’d joined the Adorers in 1956, when she was twenty-four, had taken part in the civil-rights movement; as a young African-American woman, she had marched on the streets of Petersburg, Virginia, until the police set dogs on her and the other protesters. “This time is very much like that one,” she told me. “Again, the rights of the people are being violated, only this time it’s our religious rights in favor of the almighty dollar.”

In February, the Adorers learned that the Supreme Court was refusing to hear their case. The lower court’s decisions stood. When I visited, construction had already been completed, and gas was flowing beneath the outdoor chapel. Still, the nuns were proud of the stand they’d taken. “Even if we didn’t do anything else, we’ve made people aware,” Klostermann told me. “And possibly changed peoples’ minds that nuns don’t know anything, that we’re just in the church praying all the time.”

The Adorers are considering their next moves; maybe they’ll build a solar farm, they told me. In the meantime, for the season of Lent, they distributed some daily actions that people could take to live the teachings of “Laudato Si’.” “Pray for those most affected by climate change—those living in poverty,” they wrote. “Abstain from a spirit of defeatism that despairs of fighting climate change.” And, they suggested, “Make sure your Easter chocolates are fair trade.”

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-renegade-nuns-who-took-on-a-pipeline>

April 15, 2019

Would Pope Francis back the Green New Deal?

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

"Everything is connected."

With those words, Pope Francis began Paragraph 91 of his landmark encyclical "[*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home](#)." He continued:

"Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."

If you didn't know better, you would think the pope was referring to the much-dissected and intensely debated Green New Deal.

The Green New Deal is a [14-page nonbinding congressional resolution](#) that outlines an ambitious, major mobilization to transition the United States away from fossil fuels in an effort to curb climate change below dangerous warming levels, and with it address inequality and "systemic injustices" in labor, race, gender, housing and health.

Sponsored in the House by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, and in the Senate by Sen. Ed Markey, D-Massachusetts, it sets a goal for the country to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 by generating 100% of electricity from clean, renewable, zero-emission energy sources and investing in infrastructure, smart grids and high-speed rail.

In addition, the Green New Deal promises to create millions of high-wage jobs and ensure for everyone both economic security, including a family-sustaining wage, and access to clean air, clean water and a sustainable environment. It pledges to "work collaboratively" with farmers and prioritize investment, training and job creation in marginalized communities and those transitioning away from fossil fuel industries. The resolution adds it would "promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historic oppression of ... frontline and vulnerable communities."

On March 26, the Senate voted down advancing the Green New Deal resolution, though many Democrats, the majority of whom voted present, viewed it as a "political ploy" by Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell. That has not stopped the great debate on the Green New Deal.

Republicans have levied their share of criticisms, but they have not been alone. Some Democrats, including [one presidential hopeful](#), have declined to endorse the Green New Deal, as have [labor unions](#). Ernest Moniz, former energy secretary under President Barack Obama, said it was "[impractical](#)" to achieve zero-carbon in a decade, and has joined others in [issuing their own proposal](#).

Polling conducted late last year by Yale University and George Mason University [shows wide support across political lines](#) for rapidly shifting the U.S. energy grid to clean renewable energy.

But the broad scope of at-first-glance unrelated issues all wrapped into one proposal quickly turned the Green New Deal into a target for attacks as socialist, radical, unrealistic, "[a Trojan Horse of liberal goodies](#)," and ([inaccurately](#)) spelling the end of planes, the military, hamburgers and milkshakes.

In a way, just like [Laudato Si'](#).

When Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology was released publicly in June 2015 — and in some cases, [even before](#) — the document was cast by some as "[anti-modern](#),"

"[Marxist](#)," "[socialist](#)" and "[communism](#)," and Francis labeled a "[Red Pope](#)." And then there was the [whole blowback to the pope's views on air conditioning](#).

That the Green New Deal is championed by Ocasio-Cortez, the freshman congresswoman and self-described democratic socialist, has only ramped up the criticism. When confronted with descriptions of the plan, or herself, as "radical," she has embraced the label, [telling "60 Minutes"](#) in January, "I think that it only has ever been radicals that have changed this country," before pointing to presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt.

Nor has Francis [or the Vatican](#) shied away from the "radical" word when it comes to addressing climate change, or as the pope put it at one point in his encyclical "the radical change which present circumstances require."

"The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions," Francis wrote in Paragraph 175.

'It reflects what Francis is up to'

Similarities between the two documents go beyond reception.

A starting point is Francis' reflections on integral ecology, the idea that humanity is not separate from but a part of nature, and that solutions to environmental and social issues require consideration of all factors and perspectives. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis devotes all of Chapter 4 to the topic.

"The cry of the poor and the cry of the earth are inextricably linked," Creighton University theologian Richard Miller said, referencing a much-cited line in *Laudato Si'*.

Miller, author of [God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis](#), pointed to the Green New Deal's treatment of not just climate change but issues of wages, labor and power as consonant with Francis' understanding of integral ecology. Add to that its consideration for the common good and inclusion of all parties — particularly frontline and [vulnerable communities](#), which often experience the impacts of climate change most acutely — and the Green New Deal, he said, sets up principles that are in line with what Francis says are necessary to address both environmental and social problems.

"It reflects what Francis is up to," Miller said.

At various points in *Laudato Si'*, Francis discusses environmental degradation in terms of water and land use, urban development and housing, abortion and family, technology and transportation. All that in addition to the overarching religious dimension.

Just a month after the encyclical's release, Francis was [quick to dispel](#) descriptions of *Laudato Si'* as solely an environmental document: "I say, 'No, it is not a green encyclical, it is a social

encyclical,' because we cannot separate care for the environment from the social context, the social life of mankind. Furthermore, care for the environment is a social attitude."

That sentiment is reflected in one of its most-quoted sections, where Francis stressed, "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

"In some senses, I think the [Green New Deal] resolution tries to address that," Dan Misleh, executive director of [Catholic Climate Covenant](#), told NCR. "You know, we have enormous poverty in this country and enormous wealth and there's a huge gap. So can we find ways to use the new green economy to help close that gap, so we're taking care of the planet, we're taking care of people?"

Everything is connected

The interconnected theme runs throughout *Laudato Si'*, with Francis repeating a version of the phrase "everything is connected" a half dozen times. "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected," he concluded Paragraph 138, as if to fully drive the point home.

Earlier in that same graph, Francis explained ecology as the study of "the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption."

In Paragraph 92, he quoted a 1987 pastoral letter from bishops of the Dominican Republic: "Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism."

In Paragraph 93, Francis wrote: "Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. ... Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged."

And in Paragraph 111, he stated: "Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. ... To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system."

Such passages reflect the connectedness of all things that has been a constant in Catholic teaching since the church's beginning, said Jame Schaefer, an associate theology professor at Marquette University who specializes in ecological ethics.

From St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians [about the body of Christ](#), to the writing of St. Thomas Aquinas, to present-day papacies, she said the church has long invited reflection on how the parts relate to the whole, that they are "all part of the whole scene, and one cannot be denigrated or avoided."

She likened the Green New Deal's aspirations to the United Nations' sustainable development goals, themselves the focus of a [Vatican conference](#) in March that Schaefer attended.

"In the Green New Deal, we have to see connectedness, all of these components that are being proposed. And all need to be dialogued about," Schaefer said.

Indeed, Francis began *Laudato Si'* with an appeal "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone."

The attention to the Green New Deal has elevated discussion on climate change to a degree not seen in Congress in nearly a decade with the failed 2010 cap-and-trade bill. All at a time when scientific reports indicate as few as 12 years to take action to avoid the most dangerous consequences of climate change.

As for inclusivity, the Green New Deal resolutions state it would invite all into the conversation: Dialogue with poor and marginalized communities. Dialogue with farmers. Dialogue with deindustrialized communities to ensure a just transition as coal mines close and power plants shutter.

That type of engagement with different levels of society, and not necessarily from the top down, reflects the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, Miller said.

He noted the resolution mentions several times the "duty" of the government to address climate change, consistent with what scientific reports have indicated. In October, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [issued a report](#) stating global carbon emissions would need to drop 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050 to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"This would require massive government engagement to shift society. There's no way out of that," he said.

Ambitious goals for the common good

So far, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has not staked out a position on the Green New Deal, instead focusing attention on a House bill that would [place a fee on carbon emissions](#). At least two faith groups, Franciscan Action Network and the interreligious GreenFaith, have lent support to the resolution.

Misleh of Catholic Climate Covenant called the Green New Deal "totally politically untenable." Still, he was happy that the resolution raises "this notion of the common good," something he said rarely penetrates policy discussions.

"Embodying those [principles of the common good] into public policy solutions is always tricky, but there has to be some attempt to do that," he said.

Despite any parallels, there's no indication that the Green New Deal resolution drafters drew from *Laudato Si'* in the process. The offices for Markey and Ocasio-Cortez did not respond to requests for comment.

Still, the Massachusetts senator has been a vocal supporter in the past of the pope's messages on climate change and the environment.

"Pope Francis and the encyclical give us the opportunity to examine our own policies, the impact they have on our country and our planet," Markey said at a September 2015 conference at Boston College on climate change. Cardinal Peter Turkson, one of the primary drafters of the encyclical, also attended the event.

[On the Senate floor Feb. 27](#), Markey said, "The Green New Deal resolution is bold, it's aspirational in its principles, but it's not prescriptive in its policies."

Schaefer, the Marquette theologian, told NCR that it is good that both the Green New Deal and sustainable development goals have set ambitious targets. "We need lofty goals," both nationally and internationally.

She added they provide "a vision for the future, and some direction of how to get there."

In that way, the Green New Deal and sustainable development goals help instigate dialogue, Schaefer said, and hopefully, "some serious discussion" that prompt ideas for action at all levels of governance.

That said, she still held reservations about the resolution in terms of subsidiarity, that it may place too much focus on solutions from the federal level.

"We can't always push this off to a higher level without doing something ourselves to the utmost of what we're able to do," she said, pointing to steps taken on climate change in Milwaukee where she lives.

Misleh said that the Green New Deal may provide a starting point for discussion, but that ultimately technical solutions alone won't work.

"There has to be a change in the heart and in the spirit," he said, "and again, that's really the role of religion. And it's a vital role."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/would-pope-francis-back-green-new-deal>

April 17, 2019

Pope's greeting of young climate change activist checks all his boxes

By Elise Harris
Crux

ROME - Pope Francis is expected Wednesday to meet Greta Thunberg, one of the world's leading student activists who shares the pope's ecological agenda and who, at 16, is one of the most outspoken advocates for action on climate change.

Born in Sweden in 2003, Thunberg rose to fame in August 2018 for initiating the "school strike for climate" movement, with her protest outside of the Swedish parliament in Stockholm gaining widespread media attention.

Thunberg's movement exploded and has since grown into an international initiative in which students skip classes to participate in demonstrations demanding action on stopping global warming and climate change.

On March 15, some 1.4 million students were estimated to have participated in demonstrations throughout the world. The next major global strike is set for May 24.

According to a TED Talk she gave in November 2018, Thunberg has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and selective mutism, though none of it has slowed her down.

She has continued to be a leading voice on the climate issue and has spoken at several international venues, including the COP24 U.N. climate conference in December 2018, as well as a conference of the European Economic and Social Committee and to European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker in February 2019, demanding that the EU reduce CO2 emissions by at least 80 percent if they are to meet their climate goals by 2030.

On March 13, three members of the Norwegian parliament put Thunberg's name forward as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, which will be awarded later this year.

Thunberg arrives in Rome Wednesday and has *baciamano* tickets to Pope Francis's general audience, meaning she'll be in the front row and will get to briefly shake the pope's hand after his catechesis. (*Baciamano* literally means "kiss the hand.")

Her visit is part of a wider European tour which has already taken her to the European Parliament and which will also take her to the Italian senate, where she will meet its president, Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati. She will later participate in a demonstration with local climate youth activists before leaving Rome.

In an April 14 tweet, Thunberg said, "I know it's a holiday, but since the climate crisis doesn't go on vacation, nor will we."

Though Francis has not directly referenced her movement, his own eco-agenda has been a hallmark of his papacy since the 2015 publication of his encyclical on the protection of the environment, *Laudato Si*.

He's met with countless individuals committed to acting on climate change, including a private audience with American actor Leonardo DiCaprio in 2016, and he has become one of the most outspoken leaders on the climate issue, encouraging efforts such as the COP21 U.N. conference on climate, which resulted in an agreement by members to cut greenhouse gas emissions by half of what's needed to prevent the earth's temperature from rising two degrees Celsius by 2030.

In addition, there are a few other reasons that his meeting with Thunberg stands out, including her youth and the fact that she comes from arguably one of the most secular countries in Europe.

Francis has long sought to engage young people, saying at one point in an interview that he intentionally saves his meetings with them for last during his international trips, because he wants to end on a note of hope.

On each of his international trips, especially the past year in the lead-up to his October 3-28 Synod of Bishops on youth, Francis has aimed to rouse young people to action, encouraging them not simply to be bystanders but protagonists for change.

He has often warned young people not to become "pensioners" before their time, and in his recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation on youth, *Christus Vivit*, he called for a new "popular youth ministry" carried out with "a different style, schedule, pace and method" and which "goes out to those places where real young people are active, and foster the natural leadership qualities."

In this sense, Thunberg likely fits the profile of what Francis has in mind when he urges young people to put down the phone, get off the couch and get involved. She's also an example of how the pope continues to prioritize building bridges with influencers who aren't necessarily a part of the Church.

Statistically speaking, Sweden is among the most secular nations in Europe. An officially Lutheran country with a tiny Catholic population, the nation has just one Catholic diocese, which is overseen by Cardinal Anders Arborelius, bishop of Stockholm, who was given a red hat in 2017.

It's been a defining characteristic of Francis's papacy not only to elevate cardinals in areas where there is a small or minority Catholic population, but also his insistence on the need to "build bridges" with other faith communities and even non-believers.

By meeting with Thunberg, even for a brief, simple handshake, Francis is again reaching out, this time to a young person who has chosen to get up off the sidelines and enter the global stage to discuss one of the most burning and debated issues of our time.

Yet despite being in the global spotlight, Thunberg has insisted that for her it's not about the attention, but the message, saying in a recent interview with Sky TG24 that, "Many people are concentrated on me as a person and not on climate change."

"This distracts attention from the topic, but if people talk about me, then, as a consequence, they have to also talk about the problem of climate change," she said, adding, "there is not much else that I can do but continue on this path."

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2019/04/17/popes-greeting-of-young-climate-change-activist-checks-all-his-boxes/>

April 17, 2019

Could This Ancient Jewish Practice Be a New Tool for Sustainable Agriculture?

By Ethan Blake
YES! Magazine

Schoolchildren gather around a seemingly neglected garden bed at [Urban Adamah](#), a Jewish farm and educational center in Berkeley, California. Educator Ariela Ronay-Jinich shows the students that while the plot appears abandoned, it's actually the farm's most fertile patch of soil. The children dig their hands an inch beneath the surface and uncover a thriving community of worms and insects, including a foot-long earthworm.

Ronay-Jinich explains that the plot has been set aside for shmita, a Jewish farming practice dating back to Biblical times, that lets the soil rest for one year after every six years of farming (the next shmita year is September 2021–22). Intended to express gratitude for abundance and share one's fruits of labor with the less fortunate (in accordance with laws that require farmers to forgive debts and leave field corners for the needy to glean), the practice derives from rules laid out in [Exodus \(23:10\)](#): "And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and gather in the increase thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave, the beast of the field shall eat."

Many farms leave portions of the land fallow for a season. But, says Lucy Zwigard, a farmer at Urban Adamah who has also practiced agroecology in France, "what sets shmita apart from typical crop rotations is that it invites us to reimagine our fundamental relationship with the land. Winter [cover cropping](#) and [no-till farming](#), for instance, are still production-based and 'business-as-usual.' Shmita is a full-stop, reset, rethink of cultivation."

While shmita is not widely practiced on commercial farms, even in Israel, its age-old ideals have gained traction in the United States over the past decade as the field of spiritual ecology—an understanding of environmental degradation as rooted in spiritual malaises such as greed and apathy—has taken off.

“Jewish community farms,” including Philadelphia’s [Jewish Farm School](#), Illinois’ [Pushing the Envelope Farm](#), and San Diego’s [Coastal Roots Farm](#) all employ the shmita practice as they follow Talmudic agricultural law. These organizations are part of a modern movement with a reawakened interest in what they call “earth-based Judaism,” which approaches climate change and environmental sustainability through a lens of ancient wisdom.

Even secular farms, such as the [Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture](#), incidentally employ shmita-style philosophies in their work; its farm incorporates the idea of rest and follows a seven-year rotation plan in its vegetable fields, based on the seven major plant families.

In light of [new research](#) on [carbon sequestration](#), allowing soil to go fallow poses an age-old, no-maintenance way to regenerate soil at any scale. Industrial agriculture and desertification have together depleted global grasslands and prairies to the extent that, according to Rattan Lal, director of Ohio State University’s [Carbon Management and Sequestration Center](#), the world’s cultivated soils have lost [50 to 70 percent of the carbon](#) in the soil as it has entered the air as atmospheric carbon dioxide.

In addition to reducing carbon outputs like burnt fossil fuels, humans can draw carbon back into the ground by restoring organic soil matter as a “[natural sink](#).” Through photosynthesis, plants intake carbon from the air and feed it to deep soil organisms, and [the healthier the soil, the greater its holding capacity for carbon](#). Shmita could complement other [land conservation](#) and carbon sequestration techniques—including [agroforestry](#), [holistic planned grazing](#), and [regenerative low- and no-till agriculture](#)—by that simply letting land rest can alone increase soil fertility and thus sequester carbon.

Many manifestations

Shmita dates back thousands of years, to a time when growing food was more central to human life than it is today. Farmers prepared for several years prior to store food and plant enough perennials to eat during shmita. During that year, they only harvested as much as they needed to eat at any time, and otherwise rested from agricultural labor. (Farmers were the first professionals to take a “sabbatical year,” which later extended to clergy and scholars.) However, the financial and operational logistics make whole-farm shmita much less feasible on today’s farms.

Few farms practice shmita in Israel today, and when they do, ultra-Orthodox Jews eat domestically grown perennials but import annual produce from non-Jewish farmers abroad. (Observant Jews believe that shmita law only applies in Israel, so while they eat any food grown internationally by non-Jews, they cannot eat Israeli-grown annuals.)

Even though the laws of shmita don’t officially apply in America, many farms—ranging from for-profit farms to urban synagogues’ educational gardens and rural retreat centers—harness its wisdom in creative ways, says Shani Mink, a co-founder of the [Jewish Farmer Network](#) and a member of the [National Young Farmers Coalition](#).

“At the [Isabella Freedman Center](#) in Connecticut, they designate a plot of their land during shmita year as one without fences, meaning that anyone is welcome to come and harvest,” Mink said. “Maryland’s [Pearlstone Center](#) scaled back their farming, took a break from their fellowship program, and spent the full year observing the land and composing a master ecological plan that would both grow the community and nurture the biodiversity of the 180-acre property.”

Philadelphia’s [Jewish Farm School](#) only has one fallow bed, but co-founder Nati Passow says, “we manifest shmita’s values in various other ways.” Their garden started as a vacant lot and they eventually took down the fences, bought the lot, and made it a public space for children as well as for community programs. They also started donating produce to [Food Not Bombs](#), a food justice organization with a location across the street.

“By literally taking down fences, we created inclusive public space,” Passow says. “We have been planting more fruit trees, berries, and perennials, and during the last shmita year, we restricted ourselves from storing surplus harvest—because that creates an accumulation of wealth—so that we could only take what we needed at the moment.” Passow also notes that a couple of years ago, the Jewish Farm School held a forum about shmita and, to his surprise, Christians in particular from around the country were interested in learning about and implementing the practice in their congregations and gardens.

San Diego’s Coastal Roots Farm exemplifies another revised shmita observance. “For what we call ‘above-ground growing,’ we plant seedlings and organic matter into [GardenSoxx](#), place them on top of a small shmita bed, and give them drip irrigation so that the ground below can rest,” says Sharone Oren, the farm’s education manager.

“Our farm relies on continual grants—we donate 70 percent of our produce, and we sell 30 percent of it as [pay-what-you-can](#), so we cannot pause operations for one whole year,” Oren explains. “Instead, we use the shmita plot—half of which [is planted with] perennials—as an educational tool, which we arranged as a meditation labyrinth for visitors to wander through and ponder its principles.”

[Listening, engaging, and resting with the land](#)

The Jewish sustainability organization [Hazon](#), headquartered at the Isabella Freedman Center, launched the [Shmita Network](#) and the [Shmita Project Sourcebook](#) as resources for the next shmita year.

In addition to a history and textual interpretations of shmita, Hazon’s [Sourcebook](#) provides an appendix of practical agriculture techniques that combine Jewish law with [permaculture](#) design principles. Though permaculture is a relatively new approach—first developed by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison in the late 1970s—many Jewish farmers find its methods compatible with shmita’s principles.

One section, for example, argues that a “perennial-based food system”—which includes trees, shrubs, mushrooms, and wild (uncultivated) crops—leads to a healthier and more resilient food

ecology. Perennial plants “invest more into their own plant body (since they are long-lived), while annuals invest more in producing seed (since they live only through their seed production),” according to the book. They therefore have longer roots that tolerate drought and access more nutrients in the soil, stronger bodies that resist diseases and pests, and single planting that reduces soil disruption.

Yigal Deutscher, a farmer, permaculture designer, and author of [*Envisioning Sabbatical Culture: A Shmita Manifesto*](#), says that shmita is more than just producing food and undoing the shortcuts that industrial agriculture has taken to make unsustainable profits, he says. “It is a whole systematic approach of regenerative agriculture. You cannot just buy a permaculture book and be all set. Every land has its own agreements with the people who tend it, and each has a different mythology and ecological relationship that has taken generations upon generations to learn.”

No matter if a farmer is Jewish or secular, uses crop rotations or no-till methods, harvests wild annuals or only perennials, Deutscher says, they apply shmita if they listen to and engage in a deep ecological relationship with the particular land and its needs.

Perhaps shmita could be the next sustainable agriculture wave, or as environmental psychologist and activist Dr. Mirele B. Goldsmith foresees, “In a world inspired by shmita, there will be no early deaths from filthy air, no oil spills, no devastated mountains and collapsing coal mines, no toxic wastewater from fracking, no contaminated nuclear plants, no oil-fueled wars, and no climate change.” Despite various interpretations, one conviction is ubiquitous: periodic rest is essential for one’s field and, by extension, the planet’s health.

This article was originally published by [Civil Eats](#). It has been republished here with permission.

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/climate-new-tool-ancient-jewish-practice-sustainable-agriculture-20190417>

April 17, 2019

Pope Francis meets with climate-strike teen Greta Thunberg

By Joshua J. McElwee
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City — Pope Francis met briefly during his general audience April 17 with Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenager and climate activist who inspired a million students around the world to take part in a global strike last month to protest politicians' inaction on climate change.

The pontiff approached Thunberg at the end of the audience and the two spoke for a few minutes. As Francis walked toward her, the 16-year-old held up a small sign encouraging people to take part in the planned second global strike, which is being held May 24.

In a [video message](#) after the meeting, Thunberg said Francis had been "very kind" in their moments together and had even expressed support for the climate protests.

Thunberg noted that the next strike will take place on the fourth anniversary of the publication date of Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," which embraced the scientific consensus on climate change and [urged](#) the entire world's population to act, lest we leave to coming generations a planet of "debris, desolation and filth."

The young Swedish woman began her climate protests last fall, holding a sign outside her country's parliament reading, "School strike for climate." Her action inspired other young people to follow suit in various countries, eventually leading to the first global strike in March, which included an estimated 1.4 million youth.

A day before she met with the pope, Thunberg [addressed the European Parliament](#). She urged the body to respond to climate change as they would their own house burning down, and as the global community has in pledging to rebuild the fire-ravaged Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Thunberg has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and was named April 17 to Time Magazine's annual list of the world's 100 most influential people.

"We will take it to the streets and we will continue to fight for our future, until the politicians do something," she promised in her video from Rome.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/pope-francis-meets--climate-strike-teen-greta-thunberg>

April 18, 2019

The Church of South India is taking action

United Nations Environment Programme

Chennai, Assam, Okhi and Kerala of India have been experiencing heavy floods, cyclones, forest fires and droughts since 2015—hundreds of people lost their lives and properties. Now, a forecast of a below average monsoon is expected in 2019 after last year's erratic rainfall that flooded Kerala and crippled agriculture in eastern and western States. This is a cause for worry to millions of Indians: should the monsoon turn out to be deficient, it will add to the pressures on rural employment and the economy.

With forest fires being the order of the day, wild animals are increasingly venturing out of the forests to safe areas. Recently, wild animals came out of the forests at Munnar, Marayur, and Chinnar, posing a threat to estate workers living in the tea plantations. Though some wild animals such as elephants and gaurs migrate to escape fires, others aren't able to do so. The damage to biodiversity is therefore expected to be huge, considering that the impact on reptiles,

small animals and other creatures may lead to the loss of an entire ecosystem. It is estimated that over 1,000 ha of forests, plantations and grasslands had been destroyed in this climate disaster.

The State of Global Air, published by Health Effects Institute of 2019, stated that exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution resulted in over 1.2 million deaths in India in 2017, making it the third highest cause of death among all health risks, ranking just above smoking. Globally, each year, more people die from air pollution-related diseases than from road traffic injuries or malaria.

This health-pollution nexus leads to socio-economic and cultural negative consequences leading to conflicts, displacement, migration, food insecurity, and alienation of the poor and marginalized from their own niche and resources.

The Church of South India affirms that Climate Justice ministries form an integral part of the mission of the church, for God's covenant was not only with Noah but with all living creatures of the Earth. Mathew Koshy Punnackad, Honorary Director of the Church of South India Synod Department of Ecological Concerns said: "This needs to be restored! Failing will always lead to natural calamities that would be beyond the control of humans and their ability to protect themselves from the catastrophe." He added that further misuse or abuse of God's creation will lead to fatal consequences. The Church, and other faiths, are called to continue the redemptive mission of God. It is necessary to explore the connections between the care of creation and the redemption of all creation.

The Church of South India, in collaboration with the Faith for Earth Initiative of UN Environment, along other partners, are organizing an international conference from 1 to 4 August 2019 at the Church of South India Synod Centre, Chennai. "We are providing free boarding and lodging to all our participants," said Punnackad. "We welcome those who are interested in participating in this international fellowship from educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and faith communities interested in eco-research, and willing to share experiences. The conference will be a common platform to present the models of sustainable living, mitigation and adaptation to climate change. We want to challenge students and teachers for a new approach and to inspire them for a relevant ecological ministry."

"The Faith for Earth Initiative of UN Environment promotes faith and interfaith engagement on fighting climate change and dealing with environmental challenges at the global, regional and local levels. Our support to the Church of South India Synod conference aims to promote green practices and behavioural change of the participants," said Iyad Abumoghli, Director of the Faith for Earth Initiative.

The Church of South India Synod Department of Ecological Concerns has published a Green Protocol for the Church and is hoping that the participants will acquire the needed knowledge to implement it across India. The protocol discusses issues of water conservation, renewable energy, waste management, beating plastic pollution and afforestation, among other environmental challenges.

For more information about the conference, contact Mathew Koshy Punnackad, drmathewkoshy51@gmail.com

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/church-south-india-taking-action>

April 24, 2019

ISSRNC Announces 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award for Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim

International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture

The [International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture](#) (ISSRNC) is pleased to announce that Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim have been selected as the 2019 recipients of the [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) for their outstanding contributions to the study of religion, nature, and culture. The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes distinguished figures whose work has a relevance and eloquence that speaks, not just to scholars, but more broadly to the public and to multiple disciplines.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim are foundational to the field of religion and ecology. They burst into this academic scene with the organization of ten conferences on World Religions and Ecology at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University in the latter half of the 1990s, a time when many were still wondering how the words “religion” and “ecology” went together. Ten volumes of collected works drawn from these conferences were published by Harvard University Press in *Religions of the World and Ecology*, a series edited by Tucker and Grim. When the ten conferences drew to a close, Tucker and Grim kept up the momentum by founding the Forum on Religion and Ecology, an international, multi-religious project that aims to broaden understanding of the environmental crisis by exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics. The Forum hosts conferences, supports publishing projects, and [maintains a vibrant website](#). The Forum hosts a luncheon at the annual American Academy of Religion meetings that is legendary for its nurturing and stimulating atmosphere.

Both Tucker and Grim currently hold joint appointments at Yale University in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Divinity School, and the Department of Religious Studies. Co-directing the Forum, they have continued to organize influential conferences and workshops, and nurture scores of religion and ecology scholars. As public intellectuals, they have been called to speak at many important national and international gatherings. Largely as a result of their efforts, religion and ecology is now established as a subject of study in many colleges and universities.

Together Tucker and Grim have published over twenty books and hundreds of articles, including *Ecology and Religion* (Island Press, 2014) and *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (Columbia, 2019). They both studied with the cultural historian and ecologist Thomas Berry as graduate students. This early connection has had a lasting impact on them with productive results, including the creation (with Brian Swimme) of the award-winning film [Journey of the Universe](#), with an

accompanying book and video conversations with scientists, environmentalists, and educators, as well as online courses.

It would be difficult to find a scholar with an interest in religion, nature, and ecology that has not been inspired by these two and affected personally by their generosity.

The ISSRNC is a community of scholars engaged in critical inquiry into the relationships among human beings and their diverse cultures, environments, religious beliefs, and practices. The Society's [Board of Directors](#) cordially invites all individuals interested in the scholarly investigation of religion, nature, and culture to join and to participate in ISSRNC activities.

<https://www.issrnc.org/2019/04/24/issrnc-announces-2019-lifetime-achievement-award-for-mary-evelyn-tucker-john-grim/>

April 25, 2019

Two generations, one prophetic call for climate justice

By Tomás Insua
National Catholic Reporter

Two climate superheroes, Pope Francis and Greta Thunberg, have just [met for the first time](#) in the Vatican. The April 17 meeting was something rare — an encounter between two prophets whose moral clarity will lead us out of the climate crisis.

I was blessed to participate in that conversation. As the Argentine pontiff and the Swedish activist shook hands, I was struck by the similarities they share above their obvious differences.

At 82-years-old, with a wreath of white hair and an often-delighted smile, Francis sees action on climate change as a way to protect vulnerable people, an essential part of his Christian vocation. At 16-years-old, with her hair in a braid, Greta sees action on climate change as a fight that is essential to her future, a fight for her very survival.

Francis recognizes that older generations have a responsibility to solve the challenges they've created. Greta recognizes that younger generations have an opportunity to solve the challenges they've inherited.

Catholic and secular, old and young, male and female — and yet. These two leaders are united in their unwavering commitment to action. As the United Nations climate body debates the placement of parentheses, true leadership like theirs is desperately needed.

The world is hungry for courage and commitment. Everywhere Greta walked, ordinary people took pictures by the hundreds. In the Vatican, guards asked for selfies with Greta. Nuns asked for selfies with Greta.

Everyday people are drawn to Greta because she fulfills a need that grows sharper with every passing day: our need for honesty.

Greta recently told the European Parliament that "the house is on fire." Francis has written that "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

These leaders respect us enough to admit that climate change is real. They know that storms are becoming stronger, that mosquito-borne disease is spreading, that deserts are growing. They know that these changes mean more sickness, more hunger, more conflict.

But they also know that we have the capacity for change. They know that in the past, we have banded together to achieve something greater than ourselves. They look at our incredible advances in medicine, at the increase in literacy, at the best of what humanity has to offer. They know we can solve this.

Christians are, by definition, people of hope. As Francis has written, "human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start."

On May 24, we will have another chance to choose what is good. May 24 is the date of the next in the global climate strikes that were started by Greta. It also happens to be the anniversary of "*Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home," Francis' encyclical on climate change. All people — and especially all Catholics — should seize this opportunity to stand up for the greater good.

The massive strikes have shown the power of unity in hope. In March, [1.4 million people](#) participated in over 2,000 cities. Young Catholics were part of the mobilization, taking part under the banner of the [Laudato Si' Generation](#).

This is only the beginning. Strength is gathering in all corners of the world, and we stand poised to truly protect this Earth, our common home, which belongs to us all. Business as usual is over. We have 12 years to bend the arc of emissions downward. Imagine the age you will be in 12 years, the age your children will be. This is how much time we have left.

Witnessing the meeting of these two prophetic leaders was a blessing. It reminds us that in the face of humanity's greatest crisis, a bold commitment to the greater good unites us. Across generations and cultures, true leadership is plain to see.

[Tomás Insua is executive director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/two-generations-one-prophetic-call-climate-justice>

April 26, 2019

This is how Islam advocates for the environment

By Sarah Huxtable Mohr

My Salaam

We all know that the environmental crisis facing our planet is one of the most urgent issues of our generation, and for the near future. Whales are washing up dead with hundreds of pounds of plastic in their stomachs; rain that is falling from the sky is saturated in micro-plastics; there's a lack of clean water for so many people on earth; and, the most devastating extinction event since the dinosaurs is upon us. As a general rule, research [shows](#) that one in five species go extinct annually. However, scientists are now [estimating](#) that we are losing species at 1000 to 10,000 times the normal rate. We are losing multiple species per day and the biodiversity of our planet suffering so dramatically.

So what does the Islamic faith have to say about this? Islam teaches us that everything has rights. From the animals, the plants, the air, the water, and the soil. Our Prophet (PBUH) advocated for the rights of all beings and things with his radical emphasis on justice and mercy. Most Muslims are doing something about climate change and the environmental crisis in their personal lives and practices, and some Muslims are also making this a full-time endeavor. Sister Nana Firman, originally from Indonesia, is one of the women doing the most on this issue. She kindly agreed to share some of her history, work, and thoughts with the #MuslimGirlArmy for Earth Day.

MUSLIM GIRL: Asalaam aleikum wa ramatulah wa barakathu. Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with me about your work and knowledge on environmental justice. As we know, you are one of the most active figures in the Muslim community on this issue and have done such great work, including receiving an award from the White House in 2015 as a “Champion of Change.” How did you get involved in environmental justice work and climate activism?

SISTER NANA FIRMAN: Wa'alaykumussalaam warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Alhamdulillah, the pleasure is mine!

I was born in Jambi (the eastern part of Sumatra) in Indonesia, but both of my parents are from Minangkabau culture of West Sumatra. Since the age of 9 months old, I was raised and grew up in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, until high school. I then continued my higher education in the United States. I did my Bachelor's degree in Industrial Design and my Master's degree in Urban Design. I returned back home in 1998 and was a practicing Urban Designer for several years in Indonesia. That's how I got into environmental work. My work in planning and designing cities and towns at that time required me to engage with a group of geologists from whom I learned a lot regarding the appropriate designs for cities with disaster-prone areas, such as the ring of fire regions like Indonesia.

Fast forward to early 2005, I was called upon to lead a Green Reconstruction Program by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for Nature in Indonesia for the recovery efforts after the 2004 tsunami in the religiously conservative region of Aceh (the northern tip of Sumatra). It was very

hard to convince local people of the benefits of planting mangroves to reduce the impact of storm surges at that time—until I remembered a hadith (the saying of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) about the benefit of planting trees. At that moment, I realized that Islamic teaching could help me increase environmental awareness in Indonesia.

Since then, I have taken those messages worldwide. In 2012, I moved to the United States to join my husband in California, and immediately after, I was asked by the late sister Tayyibah Taylor to write an article about Climate Change from an Islamic perspective for Azizah Magazine.

I was also invited to join a Fellowship Program with [GreenFaith](#) that same year, and I have been part of the faith-based environmental movement in the United States and around the globe ever since. In early 2015, I was asked to join the Green Mosque Committee for Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and launched the Green Ramadan Campaign nationwide.

In the same year, I helped to organize the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change that calls on Muslims everywhere to take action, from conserving water during the cleaning rituals of ablution (wudu) to reducing plastic waste during the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. And in early 2016, I co-founded the Global Muslim Climate Network (GMCN) as a platform to implement the declaration on renewable energy transformation and also to introduce the network to the international event of COP22 (UN Climate Convention) that year.

In my life's journey, learning about the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been absolutely a major influence on me because he was so green in his attitude toward the natural world, including the animals and plants. Nevertheless, looking back, I also realized that my own mother, with her passion in planting and gardening, was very environmentally-friendly and has helped to instill in me some of the green virtues.

MashAllah, what great work. Can you tell us more about GreenFaith? What kind of work are you doing? I know part of it involves the Living the Change Initiative which I think is really exciting. It's such a concrete way for average people to get involved.

So, I'd be happy to talk about this. GreenFaith is an interfaith environmental organization with a mission to inspire, educate, organize, and mobilize people of diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds globally for environmental actions. We believe that religious traditions see the sacred in nature, and that people grow spiritually through a strong relationship with the earth.

Our behavior and consumption habits must help heal, restore, and renew the Earth—because all people deserve a healthy environment, regardless of their race, gender, or income. We do our work through several activities like Training and Capacity Building, Campaigning and Advocacy, as well as Local Organizing.

[Living the Change](#) started during the UN Climate Convention in November 2017. It's a global, multi-faith campaign that supports sustainable lifestyle commitments by faith leaders and their followers in the areas of home energy use, diet, and transportation.

It came about from our concern on climate change impacts to the earth and our communities. Our misuse of natural resources over the years, while improving conditions for many, is wearing the web of life.

We have seen more disasters happening around the world, such as numbers of storms, droughts, fires, floods, and other catastrophes. They are more severe, intense and frequent, like the recent Cyclone Idai affecting the people in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Malawi, as well as the Bomb Cyclone in the U.S. which has flooded Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri.

The tragedy of such occurrences has caused much suffering and loss of life. Sadly, the most vulnerable amongst us—those least responsible for this global threat—suffer the most, unfairly and unjustly. We absolutely need to raise consciousness and start to live sustainably. This responsibility is more urgent than ever before! We have done the talks. Now, it's time for us to take real actions and to change our ways!

As Muslims, we are called by Allah in the Holy Qur'an to “walk gently upon the earth”, meaning that we are bound by a moral imperative to treat our shared common home with the care and respect it deserves. So, for me and many other Muslims, the reality of climate change not only has grave implications for the future of our planet, but also represents one of the great moral and ethical issues of our time, which must drive us to respond with actions.

And through the collective effort of Living the Change, we started to create a global community of practice in which we learn to put our beliefs into real actions in our own lifestyles. We have also inspired each other during the past year and we look forward to invite more individuals and engage more communities to join this journey together.

Thanks so much for that explanation, and mashAllah, what amazing work! Please tell me more about the Green Ramadan campaign you are working on. That sounds like something beneficial for ourselves and our communities that we all need to focus on.

Yes, absolutely! Every Muslim around the world knows that the purpose of prescribed fasting during Ramadan is to attain taqwa. In my own words, I call it, the time for purifying our souls while detoxing our bodies.

Yet, whether we admit it or not, a big part of Ramadan is eating! Even more so, Ramadan is about eating in community. We fill up a plate, then grab a drink and a few utensils, sometimes we remember a napkin, eventually sitting next to people whom we might see every Friday prayer, but never know their names. After a month of bumping elbows at iftar tables, we leave behind Ramadan with tons of styrofoam, paper, and plastic plates, forks, spoons, knives, cups, napkins and paper towels to pile up in our local trash dumps! We definitely can't ignore those bags of trash after every beautiful iftar each night—and don't forget, the food wastage as well! That really defeats the purpose of the sacred month, doesn't it? This has to change! So, how can we make this Ramadan spiritually and practically better?

First and foremost, we need to make a sincere niyah for this Ramadan to be environmentally conscious, socially responsible and compassionate to those around us by following the example

of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—the mercy to the worlds. That's how the [Green Ramadan Initiative](#) was born. Then, taking the opportunity of this blessed month, to remember and respect our planet which, through the grace of Allah, provides us with the sustenance with which we nourish our bodies and community spirit during a month of fasting.

As the khalifah upon this earth, we have a responsibility to protect the environment. And please remember that interacting mindfully with our environment is simply a manifestation of our imaan. So, we should try to make this Ramadan a better and greener one by doing one or two simple actions individually or collectively with our communities. In short, just keeping in our mind that less consumption also means less waste! May Allah azza wa jalla make it easy and help all of us accomplish a better and greener Ramadan this year, to the best of our ability in seeking His pleasure, ameen!

This is so important. I would also say that Women have a special role to play in the work of a green ummah and a green Ramadan. I mean, we do a lot of the cooking, grocery shopping, and selection of what kind of household choices each family makes. In previous conversations you had said to me that you think women play a special role in environmental work. Can you elaborate?

Well, all through the history of civilization, women unquestionably have played a significant role in managing natural resources and contributing to environmental rehabilitation and conservation, on their family-level as well as community levels. In many communities around the world, women manage water, sources for energy and food, and in some instances also forests and agricultural lands.

Survival of their families and communities is closely linked to the health of the ecosystem around them. Through their roles as farmers, collectors of water and firewood, women have developed a close connection with their local environment. And on many occasions, they are the most sensitive to changes in the environment, and often become those who suffer the most from environmental problems.

Throughout centuries, women's direct interaction with the natural world has produced their deep-knowledge about the environment, which served them as agriculturalists, water resource managers/keepers, and traditional healers/scientists. Because of their traditionally primary responsibility of domestic and household management, women interact more intensively with the natural and built environment they inhabit. Thus, they are vulnerably exposed by degraded homes, neighborhood and village/city environments, similar to if they are living in poor housing and community, with inadequate infrastructure and accessibility.

Today, with devastated ecological degradation and intense climate change impacts, women also bear a disproportionate share of the burden—whether about access to food and water in times of resource scarcity, land ownership, or even being able to swim in floods/storms. These have become disadvantages. Nevertheless, women are still marginalized in the economic and political spheres to participate in decision-making processes for climate and environmental policy, finance and implementation. But, despite those disadvantages, many experts acknowledge that

women have skills, knowledge, leadership and wisdom which is critical for solving the challenges the world faces today—climate resilience!

I was very fortunate, in 2009, to be selected to join the Climate Reality Leadership Program and was trained by former U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, in Australia. Immediately after that, I initiated Eco-Fab Living, a social campaign to increase public awareness in Indonesia, by presenting current ecological and climate crisis while at the same time advocating sustainability for a better future through citizen involvement, public participation, and policy reform.

During those times, I engaged with many women's groups who were so eager to learn and participate in taking real actions, starting from themselves and their families. And I continued that initiative when I moved to the United States in 2012—this time around by engaging American Muslim communities in practicing eco-lifestyle in their homes and their mosques.

Alhamdulillah, in the recent years, women around the world from many walks of life have become change-makers toward sustainability, including behavior-change towards living in harmony with nature.

Women now account for approximately 80 percent of household purchases in developed countries. Interestingly, based on some studies, women are more likely to buy recyclable, eco-labeled and energy-efficient products than men. Women in Sweden spend more time than men seeking information on sustainable consumption and lifestyle alternatives. Meanwhile, Japanese women are more concerned about the environment and are willing to pay more for sustainable products. And, in North America, 80 percent of women believe strongly that individuals can affect the environment, though they aren't yet doing enough.

In addition to that, more women in the developing world realize the financial and environmental advantages of eco-products and eco-markets. On many occasions, women are also the key to managing the aftermath of disasters, especially for the practical needs such as providing food, water, sanitation, clothing and health care. Since women are more likely to be affected by environmental problems due to their social roles and impoverished status in many places, women are more environmentally mindful and careful, and apt to follow sustainable pathways. At last, as the hand that rocks the cradle, they become the first and best teachers to their children—the future generation—and can instill in them the love for Allah's creations, as the manifestation of our gratitude to the Creator.

Sister Nana, your work is so important. MashAllah, thank you so much for taking the time for this interview, and to share your knowledge. Are there any closing thoughts you'd like to share?

Thanks so much. Yes, the thought I want to leave you with is that it is incumbent upon us, as Muslims, to protect the environment and to be green. Even if climate change were not an issue, it is still our duty as Muslims to walk gently on the earth and to protect all creations. With the crisis we are facing, it needs to be a central part of our lives as Muslims. This is the basic understanding we see amongst a lot of Muslims today and the direction we need to continue to take as a community.

Thanks so much, may Allah bless you in this work!

To learn more about the initiatives discussed in this interview, please visit the following websites:

<https://greenfaith.org/>

<https://livingthechange.net/>

<http://www.isna.net/greenramadan/>

<https://www.mysalaam.com/en/story/this-is-how-islam-advocates-for-the-environment/SALAAM26042019055335>

April 30, 2019

Why Bill McKibben Sees Rays of Hope in a Grim Climate Picture

By Elizabeth Kolbert
Yale Environment 360

The world has done little to tackle global warming since Bill McKibben's landmark book on the subject was published in 1989. In an e360 interview, McKibben talks about the critical time lost and what can be done now to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Three decades ago, Bill McKibben published *The End of Nature*, the first book on climate change aimed at a general audience. McKibben went on to found the international environmental group 350.org, help launch the fossil fuel divestment movement, and write a dozen more non-fiction books, as well as a novel. In 2014, McKibben received the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes referred to as the “alternative Nobel,” for mobilizing popular support for “strong action to counter the threat of global climate change.”

McKibben's latest book, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*, was published this month and debuted last week on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In an interview with *Yale Environment 360*, McKibben talks about why the critical time for action on climate was missed, where he still finds hope, and what the world will look like three decades from now.

“Thirty or 50 years out, the world's going to run on sun and wind, because they're free,” McKibben says. “The question is... what kind of world will it be?”

Yale Environment 360: It's almost exactly 30 years since you published *The End of Nature*. One way to read that book is as a warning. How you would characterize *Falter*? Is it also a warning, or are we beyond that?

Bill McKibben: Look, 30 years ago this was all still prospective. You couldn't really take a picture of climate change yet. Now, having wasted 30 years, we're at the point where it's a dominant fact of everyday life for hundreds of millions of people and promising to be the overwhelming fact of our time in the years ahead. It's too late, obviously, to stop climate change. I hope that the book gets across that it may not be too late to keep it from getting absolutely out of control. It's not a warning. It's some combination of a report and a chronicle and a plea, I think.

e360: Over the last 30 years, you've been not just a chronicler of this problem and this battle, but one of the major players in it. Was there a moment when you said, "I've got to get out from behind this computer screen"?

McKibben: Sort of. Partly it was this dawning realization that I'd miscalculated. I was 27 when I wrote *The End of Nature*. My theory of change at the time was: People will read my book and then they will change. Even when I abandoned that, I continued to think that if we piled up enough data the powers-that-be would take the hint and get to work. At some point it became clear to me that we'd won the argument but we were losing the fight.

Also, sometime in the early aughts I went to Bangladesh on a reporting trip. And when I was there they had the first big outbreak of dengue fever, which is a disease closely tied to climate. The mosquito that spreads it is expanding its range rapidly as temperatures warm. I was spending a lot of time in the slums, so eventually I got bit by the wrong mosquito. I obviously didn't die, but I remember looking at the lines of people lying on cots in the emergency clinics and thinking, "This is just unbelievably unfair." There are 165 million people in Bangladesh, but they are essentially a rounding error in the world's carbon emission tables. The iron rule of climate change is the less you did to cause it, the more and the quicker you suffer. Somehow, getting back to the States after that, back to the place that had poured more carbon into the atmosphere than any other, I did feel like it was time to do something more.

e360: Given all that has happened or, more to the point, hasn't happened since *The End of Nature*, a person could be pretty down in the dumps. But in *Falter* you say that you are hopeful, or qualifiedly hopeful. How's that?

McKibben: Part of it is the realization, looking back at the history, that it's not really a failure of human beings and human nature that's the problem here. It's a hijacking of our political and economic system by the fossil fuel industry and a small number of like-minded people. It was our bad luck that this idea that markets solve all problems and that government should be left to wither away crested just at the moment when it could do the most damage. Against that now, we've spent the last 10 years building movements. We waited too long to get started, and I kick myself regularly for that.

But now that power is showing itself. Even in the last few weeks, just to watch [Extinction Rebellion](#) and [16-year-old Swedish activist] Greta Thunberg's followers around the world shutting down schools, and the remarkable young people from the Green New Deal fanning out across this country – those things to me are signs that the fever the planet is running is producing in quantity antibodies to fight back.

e360: So much of the optimism that's out there today is techno-optimism. Some new technology is going to get us out of this. But one of the big themes of *Falter* is worries about our technological future.

McKibben: There's technology and then there's technology. You have to think about each one and decide whether it's useful or not. I'm no Luddite. In fact, a fair part of the book is a celebration of the solar panel. I travelled to Africa for *The New Yorker*, to these remote villages where no one was ever going to build a grid out. Then the price of a solar panel dropped to the point where suddenly the doctor who's been trying to deliver babies by holding a flashlight in his teeth now has a refrigerator where he can store vaccines.

When you see that, you realize what an absolutely magical thing a solar panel is. That's to be celebrated. But the idea that that would mean all technology is to be celebrated would be a strange leap to make.

e360: One of the ideas in the book comes from an Oxford professor who says the only way we're going to get out of this mess is to genetically engineer humans who are more altruistic. I thought that was brilliant in its own demented way. You didn't seem to cotton to it, though.

McKibben: Just think about it practically for one minute. You genetically engineer people in embryo, and then they have to grow up. By the time these little Albert Schweitzers were running things, the temperature would be 8 degrees higher already. That does not seem like it would work. Also, it's nuts. It's not that people are evil.

The point is, we don't lack the things we need to get done that need doing. We have the technology, and we have an enormous number of people who have great love and affection for the world around them and for other human beings.

e360: One of the themes of the book is accepting limits, both of a social and a geophysical character. When we were growing up, books like *Limits to Growth* and *Small is Beautiful* were mainstream works. Then, as you point out, we got Ronald Reagan and a generation of Ayn Randians, and talk of limits became, as it were, off limits in American politics. How do those politics get changed?

McKibben: I think that the politics now are changing back at some level. I don't know whether it will happen fast enough, but listen to Greta Thunberg some day. She's a voice of reality cutting through: "What are these absurd stories you've been telling yourselves? Because they're obviously not working."

e360: The flip side, though, and one of the difficulties of discussing limits to growth, is a great part of the world says, "Well, wait. We didn't really benefit from your growth, and now it's our turn."

McKibben: That's where the news about solar panels is so good. That's why I tried to spend a fair amount of time over the last few years in the places that represent that most fully, because they were never going to get anything out of the fossil fuel age. Now they're getting real benefit

out of renewable energy. And it's not just remote villages. India is the most interesting country right now because, in energy terms, it's about where China was 15 years ago. The question is whether it's going to go through its own coal phase or make the leapfrog. I think even two or three years ago I would have said pessimistically that it was going to go through its coal phase head on. But the costs have changed so fast, the numbers have shifted pretty decisively. India is now putting up more renewable energy than it is coal.

e360: There does seem to be a lot of energy on the streets these days, especially among young people. Talk about what you see as the next step. How does this get translated into policy?

McKibben: I was just in Denver, where I spent part of the evening with a wonderful 12-year-old girl named Haven Coleman, who was one of the leaders of the U.S. climate strikes. What we were talking about, what she and Greta and everybody else from that movement have been saying, is: "Time for adults to back us up." And it is. I think we're going to see a call in the next few weeks for adult climate strikes come autumn. That's necessary. It's pretty embarrassing to be putting all the burden for solving the world's problems on 12-year-olds.

e360: I have a similar question about the Green New Deal. It's a very broad, aspirational document, and obviously it's not getting anywhere under this administration. So what's the next step?

McKibben: The Green New Deal completely moves people's understanding of what needs to happen. The [climate activist group] [Sunrise Movement](#) folks have done a great job of building the first piece of legislation that's on the same scale as the problem. That at least helps us have a serious conversation about all this. Part of the problem for me is — I've alluded to this earlier — I don't want to say, "Oh, if only you'd listened to me back when." Thirty years ago there were a lot of small things that could have been done that would have made a big difference. Thirty years ago a modest price on carbon would have reoriented us in a big way. At this point, a modest price on carbon doesn't do very much. There's no intellectual reason not to do it, but it doesn't accomplish what we need in the time that physics has left us to accomplish anything in. It's really good to have people talking realistically about what it's going to take.

e360: One of my fears is, as the world "falters" or as prospects seem to contract, if we couldn't deal with these problems in a time of prosperity, how are we going to do it when we are facing continual crises?

McKibben: I think you've isolated what may turn out to be the essential question. Many of the signs are not so good, like a million refugees, arguably climate refugees, fleeing Syria, and a million climate refugees fleeing the drought-stricken uplands of Honduras and Guatemala have been enough to discombobulate the politics of western Europe and the U.S.

As we face that, we're going to have to make some serious decisions about whether or not we're going to respond in a generous way, in a way that acknowledges the injustice of the world that we've built, or whether we're going to try and draw up walls. Clearly Trump is an avatar for one of those approaches. If we take a Trumpian approach, it's going to be miserable in every possible

way. But it's not the only approach. The great intellectual document of the millennium so far is Pope Francis's encyclical on climate change.

e360: I know you're trying to avoid the I-told-you-so mode, but do you see an alternative history here?

McKibben: Sure. I think the key moment was the day after Jim Hansen testified before Congress in 1988, if the CEO of Exxon had stood up and said what he knew to be the truth, that our company scientists are finding just the same things as these NASA scientists. By the way, that seems to me the least that any moral or ethical system would demand. If he had done that, no one was going to say, "The CEO of Exxon's just a wimpy alarmist about all this." We would have gotten to work. Climate change is a deep, difficult problem. We wouldn't be out of the woods yet, but we'd be well on the way. That's the place where it could have gone just the other way.

e360: Let's look ahead 30 years. What will the world look like?

McKibben: Thirty years or 50 years out, the world's going to run on sun and wind, because they're free. The fossil fuel industry can't keep its business model together more than a few more decades. I think they know that, and I think that's all they're playing for now. The question is, the world that runs on sun and wind, what kind of world will it be? If it takes us 50 years to get there, then the world we run on sun and wind will be a broken world. If we make it happen faster, it's not like we're going to stop climate change. It's not like it's going to be a utopia. But we may be able to avoid the worst dystopias.

<https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-bill-mckibben-sees-rays-of-hope-in-a-grim-climate-picture>

May 2019

Happy Birthday to Gaia elder Joanna Macy

Gaia Foundation

Gaia's Director, Liz Hosken, celebrates the 90th birthday of one of Gaia's great elders; educator and Earth defender Joanna Macy. She reflects on how Joanna's 'Work that Reconnects' is helping inspire a new generation of movement leaders and activists for Earth Jurisprudence across Africa.

I first met Joanna in the late 1980s at a workshop on Deep Ecology in the UK. I was astounded. Within a few hours people from all walks of life, who did not know each other and would not call themselves environmentalists, were sharing their pain for the Earth, for other species, for special places, for the barren world they feared their children would inherit.

What was her magic, I wondered? How did she find the route into people's guarded hearts so quickly? Through her artful honing of questions and exercises, Joanna took us to the core of our common human experience. Her great gift is to help us remember we are one species, one human family in the web of life, participating in an awe-inspiring, living planet, through whom we are deeply en-souled.

Since that first meeting, I have been honored to work alongside Joanna and to introduce her *Work that Reconnects* to friends and allies in Africa, where it is now taking root with her ongoing guidance and support.

I see this work as the vital medicine we need at this time to overcome the separations created through colonialism and anthropocentrism in their many forms. These patterns of domination are deeply familiar and justified through superiority complexes of ideology, race, sexuality, gender, and religion. Yet, as we face death everywhere – of cultures, species, ecosystems, possibly life on our planet as we know it — we need to heal these wounds within the human family and come back to ourselves as Earthlings, first and foremost, to nurture the possibility of life for future generations of all species.

To mark the occasion of Joanna's 90th birthday in May 2019, Gaia has gathered testimonies from some of the emerging African leaders who have found inspiration in Joanna's vital work. They are actively applying her exercises in different contexts throughout the continent – in their personal practice, with communities and in their advocacy work.

Their words are a testament to the enduring inter-cultural power and relevance of the *Work that Reconnects*. Thank you, Joanna, for the gift you are to us at this challenging time!

African Reflections on The Work that Reconnects

After centuries of colonial and anthropocentric domination, there is an urgent need to decolonise our minds, develop life-sustaining pathways rooted in Africa's cultural diversity in Africa, and to defend life against the suicidal economic juggernaut of the industrial growth economy .

The Gaia Team's contribution to this healing path has been to develop and support immersive trainings, alongside mentors like Joanna, to deepen our experience and understanding of ourselves as Earthlings embedded in our lawful, ordered and living planet.

Through this journey, practitioners and advocates see the world from an Earth- centred perspective and learn how to inspire communities and movements wanting to revive Africa's indigenous identity as the foundation from which to free itself from colonialism's legacy.

Since 2014, Gaia has been accompanying dynamic leaders in Africa, on this collective journey of discovery, de-schooling, remembering and reconnecting with our living Earth.

The first three-year course, commended by the UN, was completed in July 2017, and graduates are now mentors for the second group who are mid-way through their journey of EJ learning.

Participants in the course come from seven African countries — South Africa, Zimbabwe, Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya. Most are working with rural communities through small local civil society organisations concerned with ecological, cultural and social transformation.

They are people at a turning point in their lives. Disillusioned by the ‘American Dream’ promoted by the industrial growth economy, and searching for ways to deepen their contribution to life-enhancing ways in these turbulent times, they are drawing inspiration from their African heritage and other traditional wisdom.

Here some of these coordinators reflect on the crucial role Joanna’s writings and *The Work that Reconnects* are playing in their own journeys:

I found Joanna’s work deeply authentic, spiritual, and therapeutic. It has given me the strength and tools to deal with the dysfunctional system that is destroying all forms of life. The image of the Spiral of the Work remains deeply engrained in my mind. It is so potent because it is packed with layers of truth that speak to the very core that makes us human. It goes beyond race, culture, religion, gender, class and ethnicity, allowing us to freely surrender to the process of ‘coming back to life’. As we are reborn, we make greater and more meaningful connections that restore and sustain life.”– Gertrude Pswarayi-Jabson, Zimbabwe.

“Joanna’s guidance highlights what our African philosophy of uBuntu teaches us, that we can connect with the pain of others. We can feel deeply and move through with reverence and love. Coming Back to Life provides the tools and affirmation that it is okay to experience being shaken up but also to know when to move through.”– Shaun Dunn, South Africa.

“Joanna expresses the mystery of life and the complex interactions among Earth community members in a fresh and compelling way. I am particularly inspired by her deep exploration of how important it is to feel pain of the world in which I am part. I couldn’t grasp this powerful thought until I encountered life threatening experiences of my own. The experience opened my mind to dare to confront any uncertainty, to think about life beyond our physical being. Her wisdom on compassion, relatedness, gratitude and seeing with fresh eyes are my lifelong companions.”– Fassil Gebeyehu, Ethiopia.

“This work is so precious, because it reveals how and why we are disconnected. It fills us with energy to rediscover the joy of being part of our living Mother Earth. These exercises of liberation are contemplative while also rallying us to work for the cause of the Universe which is living and regenerative.” Edonandji Gbegniho, Benin.

“I am so privileged to have ‘met’ Joanna through my EJ Practitioners Course. Her book with Molly Brown “Coming back to Life: the Work that Reconnects” has really reshaped my thoughts and practices as an environmental and social justice activist. Thank you Joanna for your immense contribution in raising the alert on the destruction of Mother Earth and providing

pathways for dealing with the pain, reconnecting with Her and strengthening the will to protect and defend Her at this time of the great unravelling.” Nnah Ndobe Samuel, Cameroon.

“Joanna’s books are full of practical, spiritual, and nature – based exercises that resonate with African indigenous thinking. They now form part of my daily routine. I constantly refer to her books, to draw inspiration for exercises with communities as well as for trainings or gatherings. People from all walks of life are moved and inspired to see life from a different perspective – as part of our living Mother Earth.” Method Gundidza, Zimbabwe.

“I want to express my deep gratitude to Joanna. During my training in EJ with Gaia, I had the extraordinary opportunity to explore and practice the teachings in her books. Since then they have become my faithful companions. They connected me to myself and to Nature in a deeper way and helps me to do the same for others. The exercises remind us of our ancestral wisdom, to see life and Mother Earth from a timeless dimension. Thank you Joanna for helping to elevate our thinking, to come back to life’s meaning.” Oussou Lio Appolinaire, Benin.

“The deep crises we are suffering today is because we have lost connection with reality, which is life as part of Mother Earth. We need to rebuild our relationship with Nature, to find life sustaining ways to live so that future generations of all beings can have life. Mother Earth is suffering and we can all feel it. Joanna helps us connect with this reality – the joy and the pain – and how to stay conscious. Her exercises are very powerful ways of staying awake – for communities and for other gatherings. Thank you Joanna, Zwavhudi.” Mashudu Takalani, Venda Community, South Africa.

“I have read Coming back to Life and done many of the exercises, which have ‘widened my circle of re-connection.’ Joanas teachings opened my mind and heart, enabling me to experience love and communion with Nature. It has awakened me and I feel this has brought me back to life . this inculcated in me a desire to keep widening my circle of relationship with out more than human community of life. She opened my eyes to the beautiful self-organising Universe. This is affecting those around me and my commitment to do what I can to protect and nurture life on our living Mother Earth. Joanna, I am deeply grateful and in awe of the gifts you have brought to the world at this time.” Mersha Yilma, Ethiopia.

“Joanna Macy has had such an impact on me and my friends, it has given me hope that it is possible for more people to awaken and assure life for generations to come – not only of humans! Her books are my companions which I have read many times as I continue to explore her practices. Deep gratitude Joanna.” Dennis Tabaro, Uganda.

“Coming back to life is one of the greatest books I came across through my EJ course with Gaia. Each month now as we gather for our community dialogues with elders in Tharaka Kenya, we begin with a “mystica, ’ drawing on one of the exercises, to get into the right spirit. The community loves the way the exercises stimulate their thoughts and affirm indigenous perspectives. I have used them in other gatherings too – they are powerful rituals.” Simon Mitambo, Kenya.

Find out more:

- [What is The Work that Reconnects?](#)
- [What is Earth Jurisprudence?](#)
- Learn how the EJ Practitioners helping revitalise culture and nature alongside African communities. Read stories of revival from [Kenya](#), [Uganda](#), [Zimbabwe](#) and [Benin](#).

<https://www.gaiafoundation.org/celebrating-gaia-elder-joanna-macy/>

May 1, 2019

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to Host International Summit on “Theological Formation and Ecological Awareness”

Halki Summit III Press Release

ISTANBUL – His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew will host the third Halki Summit from May 31st to June 4th, 2019. The summit will convene distinguished representatives of Orthodox theological schools and seminaries from all over the world, and focus on the theme of “Theological Formation and Ecological Awareness.” Some 50 delegates from over 40 institutions will be in attendance.

Halki Summit III is being organized as an inter-Orthodox working conference. Summit participants will hear addresses by prominent environmental theologians (Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant), and will discuss ways that ecological awareness can be fostered and advanced in Orthodox institutions of higher learning throughout the world by means of courses and other programs related to creation care. The ultimate purpose will be to promote environmental sensitivity in the core curricula of theological institutions by continuing the spirit of dialogue and exchange expressed during the two previous summits, as well as the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s longstanding concern and ongoing initiatives over three decades for the protection of the natural environment.

The first two summits convened activists and scientists, journalists and business leaders, theologians and academics, in order to engage and collaborate across intellectual disciplines and boundaries. Halki Summit I was held in June 2012, and focused on the theme of “Global Responsibility and Environmental Sustainability.” Halki Summit II took place in June 2015, and assembled pioneers and experts from around the world in a conversation on environment, literature and the arts.

Photos and reports from Halki Summit III will be published on the web and through social media. Learn more about Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s [environmental justice positions](#) and how he was dubbed “[The Green Patriarch](#)” by global media and former U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

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<http://www.halkisummit.com/hs3/press-release/>

May 3, 2019

Respect rights of indigenous people, culture, pope tells mining industry

By Junno Arocho Esteves

Catholic News Service

National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City — A "fallacious" economic model that exploits the earth's resources while disregarding the rights and cultures of indigenous people has left the planet in a precarious condition and requires a change of heart that places the common good before financial gain, Pope Francis said.

Addressing participants of a two-day conference at the Vatican May 3, the pope said that like all economic activities, mining "should be at the service of the entire human community," especially indigenous people who are often pressured "to abandon their homelands to make room for mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture."

"They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed," he said. "I urge everyone to respect the fundamental human rights and voice of the persons in these beautiful yet fragile communities."

The May 2-3 conference, titled "Mining for the Common Good," was sponsored by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and included representatives of the mining industry in Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia. Members of the Anglican and Methodist churches, the International Union of Superiors General, and Catholic social justice and development organizations also attended the event.

Also present were members of communities affected by the mining industry, including representatives of the town of Brumadinho, Brazil. In late January, the Brumadinho dam, which is owned by the Vale mining company, collapsed.

The dam failure resulted in a catastrophic mudflow that killed over 200 people and caused vast amounts of toxic material from mined iron ore to seep into the soil. Experts believe that the toxic waste will eventually reach the Sao Francisco River, the longest river that runs entirely in Brazil.

In his speech, the pope said that leaders of the mining industry must ensure that their activities lead "to the integral human development of each and every person" and "should be at the service of the human person and not vice versa."

"Attention for the safety and well-being of the people involved in mining operations as well as the respect for fundamental human rights of the members of local communities and those who champion their causes are indeed non-negotiable principles. Mere corporate social responsibility is not sufficient," he said.

Citing his encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis urged conference participants to "move away from the throwaway culture" and to continue to encourage industrial systems to adopt a "circular model of production capable of preserving resources and "maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them."

He also thanked the mining industry leaders as well as community and church representatives for attending the conference, which will aid them in safeguarding the planet while challenging them "to think and act as members of one common home."

"We need to act together to heal and rebuild our common home," the pope said. "All of us are called to cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-chronicles/respect-rights-indigenous-people-culture-pope-tells-mining-industry>

May 7, 2019

Society in jeopardy: UN report details humans have pushed one million species to the brink of extinction - NationofChange

By Alexandra Jacobo
Nation of Change

The newest United Nations report on global biodiversity has officially been released and it solidifies what the initial draft warned: human exploitation of the environment has pushed one million plant and animal species to the brink of extinction.

Conducted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the report details findings conducted by a team of hundreds of experts from 50 nations. Conclusions from the report warn of the "accelerating" and "unprecedented" extinction rates due to the human-caused climate crisis as well as ominous tidings for the future of human society as we know it.

“This is the most thorough, the most detailed and most extensive planetary health check. The take-home message is that we should have gone to the doctor sooner. We are in a bad way,” says Andy Purvis, professor at the Natural History Museum in London and a lead author on the report. “I cannot overstate it. If we leave it to later generations to clear up the mess, I don’t think they will forgive us.”

“Society we would like our children and grandchildren to live in is in real jeopardy.”

According to the report the top five direct drivers of change in nature that have global impacts are:

1: Change in land & sea use.

2: Direct exploitation of organisms.

3: Climate Change

4: Pollution

5: Invasive Species.

“The overwhelming evidence of the IPBES Global Assessment, from a wide range of different fields of knowledge, presents an ominous picture,” said IPBES Chair, Sir Robert Watson. “The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”

Watson stresses that, “It is not too late to make a difference, but only if we start now at every level from local to global. Through ‘transformative change’, nature can still be conserved, restored and used sustainably – this is also key to meeting most other global goals. By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.”

More than 40% of amphibian species are at risk, almost 33% of reef-forming corals, and more than 1/3 of all marine mammals. Many plant and animal species risk extinction within decades.

“[There is] very little of the planet left that has not been significantly altered by us,” Sandra Diaz, co-author of the report and professor of ecology at the University of Córdoba, says. “We need to act as stewards for life on Earth.”

Findings are based on the systematic review of about 15,000 scientific and government sources, as well as (for the first time ever at this scale) on indigenous and local knowledge, particularly addressing issues relevant to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

Additional notable findings from the report include:

- Three-quarters of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. On average these trends have been less severe or avoided in areas held or managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.
- More than a third of the world’s land surface and nearly 75% of freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production.
- The value of agricultural crop production has increased by about 300% since 1970, raw timber harvest has risen by 45% and approximately 60 billion tons of renewable and nonrenewable resources are now extracted globally every year – having nearly doubled since 1980.
- Land degradation has reduced the productivity of 23% of the global land surface, up to US\$577 billion in annual global crops are at risk from pollinator loss and 100-300 million people are at increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection.
- In 2015, 33% of marine fish stocks were being harvested at unsustainable levels; 60% were maximally sustainably fished, with just 7% harvested at levels lower than what can be sustainably fished.
- Urban areas have more than doubled since 1992.
- Plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980, 300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge and other wastes from industrial facilities are dumped annually into the world’s waters, and fertilizers entering coastal ecosystems have produced more than 400 ocean ‘dead zones’, totalling more than 245,000 km² (591-595) – a combined area greater than that of the United Kingdom.
- Negative trends in nature will continue to 2050 and beyond in all of the policy scenarios explored in the Report, except those that include transformative change – due to the projected impacts of increasing land-use change, exploitation of organisms and climate change, although with significant differences between regions.

[To read a full summary of the report, click here.](#)

<https://www.nationofchange.org/2019/05/07/society-in-jeopardy-un-report-details-humans-have-pushed-one-million-species-to-the-brink-of-extinction/>

May 9, 2019

U.S. religious leaders issue “Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency”

By Margaret Bullitt-Jonas
Reviving Creation

What is an emergency? [Merriam-Webster defines emergency](#) as “an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action.” Does climate change count as an emergency? Not if an “emergency” is necessarily “unforeseen,” for when it comes to climate change, scientists have been sounding the alarm for decades, telling us that burning

massive quantities of fossil fuels would lead to catastrophe. Of course, the fossil fuel industry (see [#ExxonKnew](#)) has spent millions of dollars trying to make the climate emergency as “unforeseen” as possible, for as long as possible, to as many people as possible. But the clock has run out. The time of reckoning is at hand. Foreseen or unforeseen, the climate crisis is upon us and it calls for immediate action.

In the same week that the [U.K. became the first country to declare “an environment and climate emergency.”](#) and in the same week that the [Anglican Communion became, as far as I know, the first global religious body to recognize a climate emergency](#), National Religious Coalition for Creation gathered for its 20th annual prayer breakfast in Washington, DC. NRCCC is a group composed of members of major faith groups in America, including Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Orthodox Christians, and Jews. After opening prayers, a lively presentation by [Chad Hanson \(Director of the John Muir Project\)](#) on forest protection as an essential aspect of addressing climate change, and the bestowal of the 2019 Steward of God’s Creation award to two outstanding climate champions – the [Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Durley](#) and the [Rev. Dr. Jim Antal](#) – we moved outside to announce the release of [Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Climate Emergency](#).

Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency clarifies two essential facts: humanity has an extremely short window of time in which to avert irreversible climate chaos, and religions around the world consider protecting God’s Creation a moral and spiritual imperative.

Perhaps it was fitting that the *Religious Declaration* was publicly announced in Pershing Park, a National World War I Memorial. Just as William James and Jimmy Carter spoke of “the moral equivalent of war,” so, too, are increasing numbers of citizens realizing that we need to address climate change with the same focus, fervor and self-sacrifice of a nation that is mobilized to fight a war.

The stakes are high. As stated in the opening lines of the *Religious Declaration*, climate change is unlike any other challenge that confronts humanity, “because it is largely irreversible ‘for 1,000 years after emissions stop’ with ‘profound impacts on global climate, ecosystems and human societies for the next ten millennia and beyond.’¹ The shocking truth is that decisions we make now could, in the words of climate economist Ross Garnaut, ‘haunt humanity until the end of time.’² Nuclear war, while also irreversible, is only a possibility. Human-induced climate change is underway now, and its impacts are greater and more extensive than scientific models predicted. We will significantly alter the future of civilization as we know it and may eventually cause its collapse if we continue down this path.”

The *Declaration* calls for bold, concerted action: “Decades of delay on climate action have made small corrective measures and incremental approaches useless. Those who are invested in maintaining the status quo, or who put forth proposals that are clearly incompatible with what climate science demands, are condemning innocent young people – including their own children and generations to come – to a future of unimaginable suffering: the mass death of human populations and the extinction of species.”

The *Declaration* places the climate crisis within a moral context: “Further delay in addressing climate change is a radical evil that as people of faith we vigorously oppose.”

One of the principal writers of the document, Dr. Richard W. Miller, Professor of Philosophical Theology and Sustainability Studies, Creighton University, reflected later on this last point. He commented: “The manufacturing of doubt and the sowing of confusion about climate change by fossil-fuel-industry-funded think tanks, the deceptive climate-change reporting by ideologically-driven media outlets, the investing in fossil fuel infrastructure by banks and high-profile investors, the expansion of pipelines, oil, and gas wells are all radically evil actions that continue to this day. The institutions that engage in these actions are enemies of humanity and the web of life. We will oppose these institutions from our churches and synagogues, from our pulpits and lecterns, and from our social halls and gathering spaces. We will fill the halls of power like the young people in the Sunrise Movement in their push for a Green New Deal; we will join school-aged children in the streets striking for climate action; and we will rebel with the young people in the Extinction Rebellion in the race to head off the destabilizing of the climate system within which civilization developed.”

I, too, was one of the principal authors of the *Religious Declaration*, and in our press release, I commented: “God sent us into the world to bless and heal, not to ravage and destroy. But as a species we are hurtling willy-nilly down a suicidal path that risks bringing down not only our own civilization but also the web of life as it has evolved for millennia. As people of faith, we stand with the Spirit of life, who calls us to build a more just society in which all people and all God’s creatures can thrive.”

The third lead author of the *Religious Declaration*, inventor and tech business entrepreneur David W. Carroll, asserted: “There is no moment more critical for all-out personal and cooperative action. Today’s environmental emergency demands we implement solar and wind with power storage immediately. It is ready, and it provides unequalled economic value. Let us not fail in our duty to serve and protect Planet Earth.”

The *Declaration* amplifies statements that major denominations have already issued on climate change. Religious groups across the United States, including the National Council of Churches, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Central Conference of American Rabbis, National Association of Evangelicals, and the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, have all called upon policymakers and elected officials to take strong action to address global climate change.

Are there risks in declaring climate change an “emergency”? I will name two. One risk is that the moment will be wasted – the proposed solutions will be weak and ineffective. A recent [blog post from Council Action in the Climate Emergency \(CACE\)](#) explains: “As climate emergency talking and thinking shifts further towards climate emergency action, it is imperative that ‘climate emergency’ is not co-opted to mean something ‘convenient’ or ‘pragmatic’ (i.e. weak goals and slow action). Climate emergency has to stand for safe climate principles for restoring a safe climate.” (The article, which is by Bryony Edwards, goes on to propose how to set targets for climate emergency emissions.)

A second risk in declaring a climate emergency is that political and corporate powers could thereby be given free rein to consolidate their advantages and shut out the people who suffer the most. [Casey Williams, a writer in North Carolina, points out in an article for The Outline](#), “...Given that the American right seems to be [quietly coming around](#) to the reality of climate change (despite some high-profile acts of denial), ‘national emergency’ rhetoric and policy could easily become a conservative strategy for dealing with climate change by building ‘big, beautiful walls’ to exclude various Others from America’s relative stability. Meanwhile, the wealthy in the U.S. and around the globe will continue to erect seawalls around their coastal villas and hire [private firefighters](#) to protect their Malibu mansions. The real tragedy of treating climate change as an emergency, rather than an uneven distribution of physical and social harm, is that it would worsen the inequality that brought us to this point in the first place.”

In my view, the *Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency* successfully avoids both risks. It presents a menu of effective solutions. And it also lifts up the need to tackle both the ecological and the economic crises. As Pope Francis stated in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, we need to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor – neither one can be adequately addressed alone.

That is why *Religious Declaration* supports “the bold direction of the Green New Deal, or other similar science-based proposals, as an opportunity for this country to commit to stabilizing the climate while creating ‘unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States.’ This specifically includes low-income communities, communities of color, and those that have historically been marginalized or underserved. The Green New Deal is the first resolution that addresses the climate crisis with the urgency, focus, and comprehensiveness that the situation requires. Our nation mobilized every part of society during World War II and the Great Depression. Like the Greatest Generation, we must rise to the occasion and commit to doing what science says it takes to avoid irreversible catastrophic climate chaos and make a rapid and just transition to a clean energy economy.”

- Other interfaith groups also support the Green New Deal. GND is not a piece of legislation, but a statement of vision and values. To sign “Faith Principles for a Green New Deal” sponsored by Interfaith Power & Light, click [here](#). To learn more about the Green New Deal and to sign a GreenFaith statement of support, click [here](#).

The NRCCC’s *Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency* has been signed by religious leaders across the country, including heads of denominations, bishops, clergy, and leaders of interfaith environmental organizations. Here are some of the religious leaders who signed the *Declaration*: Rev. John Dorhauer (General Minister and President, United Church of Christ); Rt. Rev. Marc Andrus (Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of California); Rt. Rev. Doug Fisher (Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts); Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel (Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia, Seattle, WA); Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld (Bishop, Episcopal Church of New Hampshire); Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates (Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts); Rt. Rev. Roy F. (Bud) Cederholm Jr. (Retired Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts); Rev. Fletcher Harper (Executive Director, GreenFaith); Phoebe Morad (Executive Director, Lutherans Restoring Creation); Rabbi Warren Stone (Central Conference of American Rabbis), Rabbi Benjamin Weiner (Jewish Community of Amherst,

MA); Rabbi Alison Adler (Temple B'nai Abraham, Beverly, MA); Rabbi Moshe Givental (West Bloomfield, MI); Rabbi Katy Z. Allen (Jewish Climate Action Network, Wayland MA); Rev. Dr. Jim Antal (Special Advisor on Climate Justice to UCC General Minister and President); Rev. Brooks Berndt, Ph.D. (Minister for Environmental Justice, United Church of Christ); Rev. Mariama White-Hammond (Pastor, New Roots AME Church, Boston); Rev. Fred Small (Minister for Climate Justice, Arlington Street Church, Unitarian Universalist, Boston).

I will give the last word to a rabbi and a pastor. Each of them was moved to write a short response to the *Religious Declaration*, praying that it would reach many minds and hearts.

[Rabbi Warren Stone](#) (Central Conference of American Rabbis and Co-chair of NRCCC) wrote: “We must act boldly and with vision to stem the tides of climate change’s devastating impact on humanity and all God’s creation. May we look back on our day and age and say that we saw what was happening to the climate and we acted with courage and prescience to do what was necessary to cut our CO2 emissions and dramatically reduce the threats of climate destruction for future generations.”

The [Rev. Dr. Jim Antal](#) (Special Advisor on Climate Justice to UCC General Minister and President) wrote: “Momentum is growing as congregations from every faith tradition are shifting their focus from personal salvation to collective salvation. Along with the outspoken voices of children and youth, people of faith are declaring that we are now in a time of reckoning. To continue ‘business as usual’ as the corporate powers insist is morally bankrupt. God is calling us to re-build our economy and center our lives on sustainable, earth-restoring values and practices.”

Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency is posted at the NRCCC Website and can be read and downloaded [here](#).

1. Susan Solomon, Gian-Kasper Plattner, Reto Knutti, Pierre Friedlingstein, (2009) Irreversible Climate Change Due to Carbon Dioxide Emissions,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106 (6) 1704-1709, at 1704; DOI:10.1073/pnas.0812721106; and Peter U. Clark et al, (2016). Consequences of Twenty-First-Century Policy for Multi-Millennial Climate and Sea-Level Change. Nature Climate Change. 6.10.1038/nclimate2923.

2. http://www.garnautreview.org.au/pdf/Garnaut_Chapter24.pdf (last lines of the review)
<https://cosmosmagazine.com/climate/ross-garnaut-s-bright-idea>.

<http://revivingcreation.org/u-s-religious-leaders-issue-religious-declaration-of-unprecedented-human-emergency/>

May 14, 2019

A look at Amazonia ahead of the October Synod of Bishops

Vatican News

In this video, Vatican Media presents some excerpts of video footage of the Pan-Amazon Region looking forward to the Synod of Bishops in October 2019.

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, will be held from Sunday 6 to Sunday 27 October 2019 in the Vatican, to reflect on the theme: “Amazonia: new pathways for the Church and for an integral ecology”.

Pope Francis first announced the synod on 15 October 2017. The idea of such a synod was born out of his 2015 environmental encyclical “Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home”, which calls for action on global warming and pinpoints the Pan-Amazon Region as an area of vital importance.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-05/synod-bishops-amazonia-october-2019.html>

May 14, 2019

Q & A with Sr. Sheila Kinsey, advocating for Earth through Sowing Hope for the Planet

By Brian Roewe

National Catholic Reporter

At the [May 6-10 triennial meeting](#) in Rome of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), leadership of women religious around the world received an update on a campaign that aims to place special focus on congregations' efforts to heed Pope Francis' call to environmental stewardship and their continued work to put his words into action.

Started in June 2018, the [Sowing Hope for the Planet](#) campaign challenged congregations to find ways, both personally and in their communities, to implement the message of the pope's encyclical "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)."

Leading the effort has been Sr. Sheila Kinsey, a member of the Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and executive co-secretary for UISG's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission. That commission partnered with the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#) to promote Sowing Hope for the Planet, with more than 250 congregations taking part. A survey launched in March has tracked sisters' participation, with the hope to identify best practices that can be expanded.

During the UISG assembly, Kinsey provided the 850 superiors general gathered there with a [progress report](#) on Sowing Hope for the Planet. Sisters were also encouraged to appoint contact

people within their congregations to broaden the campaign, including through participation and support of the upcoming [special synod on the Amazon](#), set for October in Rome.

Kinsey spoke with GSR by email in March about Sowing Hope for the Planet's genesis and how sisters have taken up the ecological cause.

GSR: What led UISG to take up the Sowing Hope for the Planet program?

Kinsey: On June 18, 2018, the UISG board launched a two-year campaign, Sowing Hope for the Planet, to share efforts of the sisters in putting *Laudato Si'* into practice. Already, *Laudato Si'* had spread throughout religious communities, becoming a deeply meaningful connection with people and the Earth through faith and the words of Pope Francis.

This realization led to the awareness that this connection has the potential to develop a deeper interconnection, carrying the message into a global network of religious working together to "hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor." Using this collective listening to create a collective voice and collective action carries greater potential for effect than we can offer alone.

Pope Francis has underlined the fundamental connection that exists between the environmental crisis and the social crisis we are currently experiencing. He asks us for a personal and communal ecological conversion, often reminding us, "Everything is interconnected."

Why did UISG decide to place this emphasis on putting *Laudato Si'* into practice now?

Part of the timing arises with the growing awareness and desperation of climate change and the urgent need to meet the challenges of global warming. *Laudato Si'* offers a spiritual relationship and solutions to a critical situation. This campaign offers a practical and spiritual platform for solutions that are so desperately needed right now.

It begins with awareness and unfolds with inspiration, giving the sisters' voice to their influential power to make a difference. The campaign coordinates experiences that provide the sisters and their connections the opportunities to become painfully aware of the needs of our common home so as to dare to turn what is happening to the world into their own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.

How many congregations have participated?

Approximately 394 sisters from 265 communities have registered with the campaign through the website and the webinars.

What are some of the ways congregations have participated?

Congregations have been rising to the message of *Laudato Si'* since it was first published. Many congregations have shared a variety of inspiring ways they are implementing it within their communities and missions.

There are many who are engaging *Laudato Si'*, bringing in the whole community in shared reflection with study sessions; developing resources to teach parents, teachers and catechists how to implement *Laudato Si'*; and reflection groups, some of which are also reading books that develop the themes of *Laudato Si'*. Creative use of both faith and scientific resources are also being used to draw on and integrate what is available. One group has used holy books such as the Bible and Bhagavad Gita, and another has developed a cosmology group using scientists as speakers. Both offer examples of how faith and science come together in support of our common goals.

Congregations are beautifully using church services as a platform to offer liturgical resources, offertory petitions, closing blessings, accepting the world as a sacrament of communion and offering a *Laudato Si'* quote from a basket to reflect on during the week. These efforts engage both congregation and community and are very easily incorporated into regular services, offer a sense of involvement and commitment to the care for our Earth, and create meaningful connections together. Other inspiring acts in church locations include decorating the chapel with icons of the biblical creation story surrounded by plants and flowers, celebrating the [Season of Creation](#) [annually from Sept. 1 through Oct. 4] within the congregation and the dedication of a cosmic walk path.

Advocacy and the effort to raise awareness is seen in many community efforts: writing newsletter articles, offering education about the ongoing devastation caused by burning wood or charcoal, the formation of a parish care-of-Earth group to promote and care for the environment in the local community, and raising awareness on changing lifestyles and common household care. One group became more aware of the harmful effects of plastics and the misuse of paper and electricity, which has allowed their use of them to be curbed.

Engaging in commitment and action, communities have offered many different opportunities for concrete action at the local level. Some events include sisters writing a commitment to the planet during an Oct. 4 celebration [the feast of St. Francis of Assisi]; potlucks at church-sponsored events using biodegradable cold cups, which can be composted with food waste; education and action in understanding food, such as fair-trade articles, waste management (composting and recycling) and ecological cleaning products. These are beautiful demonstrations of concrete ways we can engage in our daily lives and communities. One community is even supporting a project to offset their carbon footprint by contributing to a fund for the development and care of Earth projects in countries of Africa. Coming together in this way, our united voice reaches out into the world.

Understanding the need for expertise, there has even been seeking of professional assistance, such as with water and energy, by engaging with external consultants to assess energy consumption; this resulted in changing the heating system, lights and several other elements that are saving money and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This offers another way that awareness of our own consumption can lead to significant change.

Are there any efforts in particular that stand out?

It is difficult to think of just one. These relevant and inspiring experiences have made a difference in people's lives. They allow for an engagement in meaningful prayer, significant connections, and the creation of networks, as well as allowing our hearts, our hands and our spirits to be engaged in the care of our common home.

How would you assess the implementation of *Laudato Si'* so far within the church and within women religious congregations? What are next steps?

There are many Catholic organizations engaged in the implementation of *Laudato Si'*. We are collaborating with the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), which works within the Catholic Church to better care for our common home. GCCM has records of their involvements within the Catholic Church. The founding document is Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

We also work with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and have participated in their conferences. We have gained additional contacts through those experiences.

What is the importance of higher levels of church structures taking an active role in implementing *Laudato Si'* — for example, UISG with Sowing Hope for the Planet — for its adoption within the wider church and for creation care to be seen as a bigger priority?

One major opportunity provided by the campaign is to raise a collective voice and develop a collective strength to impact what is happening in our world. One thing that is clear in our history is that designated power structures usually are given the bigger say in what is happening and, often, are the loudest voice.

UISG is a unifying voice for the sisters around the world. Through this campaign, we have the opportunity to organize the voice of the sisters in the effort on many levels of structures in order to enhance and recognize our contribution to the care of our common home.

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/blog/q/environment/q-sr-sheila-kinsey-advocating-earth-through-sowing-hope-planet-56164>

May 17, 2019

Conservationists at Vatican conference call for protecting biodiversity

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City — People's attitudes toward nature as well as their economic systems and consumption habits need to radically change in order to protect biodiversity on the planet and promote a more sustainable and caring world, said participants at a Vatican-sponsored conference.

"We can learn how to take care of the world. And we must use all our strength to find ways of making the world more human, giving people the possibility to live their lives so that we may share the richness and the resources given to us in a way that could never be possessed or owned by us," the participants said in their final statement May 15.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences brought together heads of natural history museums, botanical gardens, zoos and aquariums along with experts in biodiversity and ecology for a conference May 13-14 on species protection.

The conference came after the independent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published results of a three-year study which found that 1 million – that is, one in four – animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction within decades. Land use, pollution, overfishing, deforestation and climate change are among the factors driving the unprecedented decline in biodiversity, said the May 6 report.

The concluding statement issued by the pontifical academy launched a call for action for conservationist leaders, experts, policy advisers and faith communities to help humanity build a new sustainable relationship with the natural world.

"We need to change our mindset, our mentality of exploitation that has driven us to the point where we are now. We seem to live in an immense and fantastic world, forgetting about what has been given to us," it said.

"The worldwide communities of natural history museums, zoological and botanic gardens are catalytic and significant allies in the global drive toward species protection and nature preservation," especially because of their expertise and ability to educate and impact so many people around the world, particularly young people, it said.

Creating "islands of protection," such as national parks, seed banks and so on, are not enough when it comes to preventing the threats of a global loss of species, the statement said.

"Fundamental societal change is needed," which includes people reducing their "ecological footprint" and changing patterns of consumption, particularly with fossil fuels, food waste and land use, it said.

"These patterns of social behavior need a course correction," it said, and "our economic systems need to be redesigned toward circular bio-based economic systems, in which humankind and nature are less in conflict.

"Science and innovation, sound governance, and incentives for industry and agriculture need to come together to achieve such a sustainable bioeconomy, adjusted to local circumstances."

Because all major world religions, in principle, "are committed to respecting and preserving nature," they, too, should agree on joint action for change.

"These communities are called upon to explore new synergies for enhanced impact on people's world views and new joint collective actions to address extinction problems," it said.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/conservationists-vatican-conference-call-protecting-biodiversity>

May 21, 2019

Interest in protecting environment up since Pope's 2015 encyclical

By John Cannon
Mongabay

- *New research into the usage of environmentally related search terms on Google suggests that interest in the environment has risen since Pope Francis released *Laudato Si'* in 2015.*
- **Laudato Si'*, a papal encyclical, argues that it is a moral imperative for humans to look after the environment.*
- *Researchers and scholars believe that the pope's support for protecting the environment could ripple well beyond the 16 percent of the world's population that is Catholic.*

Just before Pope Francis released *Laudato Si'*, an encyclical, or formal letter from the pope, on the environment, on May 24, 2015, global concern for the environment seemed to be on the wane. Environmental scientist Malcolm McCallum had recently co-authored a [paper](#) that surmised as much, based on an analysis of Google search terms going back to the early 2000s.

"I threw in [the search term] 'environment,' and 'environment' was falling through the floor," McCallum, an assistant professor at Langston University in Oklahoma, said in an interview. His findings jibed other recent studies on [the publication of books](#) and [surveys of student attitudes](#).

But after the papal encyclical, which was subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home," McCallum decided to take a second look at the Google Trends data, examining how people in dozens of countries around the world were using search terms like "conservation," "biodiversity," "climate change" and "pollution."

McCallum's analysis suggested a marked and sustained change in interest after the encyclical's release.

"Sure enough, it shot through the roof," he said. "I was actually very surprised."

On May 20, days before the fourth anniversary of the release of *Laudato Si'*, McCallum published his [findings](#) in the journal *Biological Conservation*, covering the period from 2012 up through 2017.

Francis's call to tackle environmental issues isn't altogether new for the Roman Catholic Church. Though not a biblical scholar by training, McCallum found evidence that Catholic teaching may have encouraged an environmental movement in the 1900s. But neither such a full-throated pronouncement as the 2015 encyclical — nor the support it could provide to such movements — had happened before, he said.

The “game changer” in this letter was its codifying of environmental responsibility as part of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which are “basically things that every practicing Catholic should be doing all the time,” McCallum said. “They're really not flexible.”

The encyclical's call to action centers on concern for fellow humans and what will happen if the destruction of the environment — for resources, for example, or through climate change as we continue to burn fossil fuels — is allowed to continue. “The pope argues for the moral obligation to look out for others,” McCallum said.

“They're all impacted by the physical and biological environment you live in,” he added, “and I think that's really what they're bringing to light.”

McCallum said he believes that the rising interest suggested by his data indicates that the pope's words could be resonating beyond the 16 percent of the world's population that is Catholic.

“These encyclicals that create paradigm shifts are very important within the church, and most of them influence outside the church,” he said. “If you go through and you look at news stories back as it was released and just afterward, everybody's asking — is it going to matter? Does anyone really care what the pope thinks? Well, clearly, people apparently still do.”

The words of pontiffs have rippled far beyond the opinions of Catholics in the past, he said. Encyclicals condemning Nazi anti-Semitism in the 1930s, Marxism in the 1980s, and abortion and birth control in the 1960s have all in part framed the way society looks at these issues. In the latter case, the stance on abortion became a defining issue in the U.S. political system just a few years after Pope Paul VI issued [Humanae Vitae](#) in 1968.

Catholic scholars agree that Francis's support for the environmental movement of today could have a similar impact.

“The pope doesn't expect this movement to just be a Catholic thing,” Robert Mickens, English editor of the Catholic newspaper *La Croix International* in Rome, told Justin Catanoso, [reporting](#) for Mongabay in 2017. “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.”

McCallum points to evidence, such as the [Youth Climate Strikes](#) on the first Friday of the Catholic season of Lent, backing up the increased interest he's been able to divine from the Google search data. As a scientist accustomed to finding evidence for bad news, whether showing the [vertebrate extinction crisis](#) in 2015 or the [global decline in amphibians](#), finding a renewed interest in reversing such trends represents a positive shift for McCallum.

“It made me very happy,” he said.

Banner image of peat forest being burned in Indonesia by Rhett A. Butler/Mongabay.

Citation

McCallum, M. L. (2019). Perspective: Global country-by-country response of public interest in the environment to the papal encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. *Biological Conservation*, 235, 209–225. doi:[10.1016/j.biocon.2019.04.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2019.04.010)

<https://news.mongabay.com/2019/05/interest-in-protecting-environment-up-since-popes-2015-encyclical/>

May 22, 2019

Europe's first eco-mosque invokes God to fight climate change

By Adela Suliman

Thomson Reuters Foundation

Located in the world-famous British university city, the mosque opened its doors just in time for the fasting month of Ramadan and is adorned with wooden columns and solar panels

LONDON, May 23 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Europe's first green mosque is hoping to harness the power of Islam to tackle climate change, urging Muslims who worship in the British newbuild to do more to protect the planet.

As one of the fastest growing faiths in the world, Islam could be a powerful force if Muslims were stirred to environmental action, climate activists say.

Which is where [Cambridge Central Mosque](#) steps in.

Located in the world-famous British university city, the mosque opened its doors in May just in time for the fasting month of Ramadan. It is adorned with latticed columns, clad in solar panels and surrounded by crab apples, with space for 1,000 and a mission to become a force for climate good.

"The mosque symbolises the spiritual heart of the Muslim community, it's the central locus where the worshipper connects to God," said mosque trust patron and musician Cat Stevens.

Stevens, famous for hit songs "Wild World" and "Morning Has Broken", became Muslim in the 1970s and is now known as Yusuf Islam. He told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that Muslims had an important role to play in tackling the climate crisis.

"It (the mosque) is part of the re-education process, digging deeper into the true nature of Islam to reveal its harmony with the balance of the universe," said Stevens.

"Many Muslims have forgotten this and are not contributing enough to the present climate crisis."

The 24-million-pound (\$30-million) building, funded largely by the Turkish government, will welcome hundreds of worshippers for night prayers every night, during this month of Ramadan - following a 18-hour fast from food and drink in daylight hours.

With recycled rainwater to irrigate the gardens and energy-harvesting heat pumps, the mosque says it produces close to zero carbon emissions and boasts better green credentials than the thousands of other mosques that are scattered across Europe.

"The Koran emphasises the beauty and harmony of the natural world as a sign of God's creative power and wisdom," said mosque trust chairman and Cambridge University professor, Timothy Winter, also known as Abdal Hakim Murad.

"The struggle against climate change and the mass extinction of species is not only a practical question of human survival, but is a battle to respect and protect God's gifts."

ENCHANTED FOREST

Large skylights illuminate the main prayer hall so no artificial lights are needed by day, while the rooftop is dressed in panels that turn sun to power.

It is not just the building that is green.

The mosque follows broad Islamic principles that favour environmental protection, say Muslim climate experts, be it the stewardship of God's earth or sacred teachings on preserving water, planting trees and protecting animals.

"Muslims could be a powerful force that can be mobilised against climate change," said Shanza Ali, co-founder of Muslim Climate Action, a British advocacy group.

"However this would require us to go back to Islamic teachings and back to valuing the skills, ideas and respect that communities would give the environment," she said.

For Ali, a fixed eco-message would not work for the world's diverse [1.8 billion](#) Muslims; a pluralistic approach could better "revive the connection" between Islam and the environment.

"Projects like the Cambridge mosque are going to be critical in raising awareness and showing people that this isn't just a niche issue that some Muslims have picked up, but it's an issue at the heart of our belief," she said.

In 2015, Islamic faith leaders came together to urge Muslims to play a more active role in combating climate change in a [declaration](#) that was welcomed by the United Nations.

The declaration lamented the "corruption" that humans had caused and called for lower emissions, an end to deforestation and greater commitment to renewable energy sources.

Religious leaders from [Pope Francis](#) to the Dalai Lama have preached similar eco-messages, warning their faithful of the dangers of growing climate change.

According to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation [charity](#), the world's big faiths could galvanise some 5 billion people into climate action, 85% of the world's population.

In Britain, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams - representing some 85 million Christians globally - endorsed Green Party political candidates ahead of Thursday's European elections, [saying](#) it was "harder and harder to pretend that we're not living in the middle of the most serious environmental crisis in recorded history."

BRIDGING CULTURES

Cambridge is home to about 6,000 Muslims, born as far afield as Indonesia and Italy, many of them students or professionals.

Worshipper Haseef Ahmed, 27, said the green message chimed with his values and served as a reminder that the world's natural supplies were limited.

"The mosque is the central point of all Muslim communities," said Ahmed, by telephone. "It's the space. So if we're going to engender more green, environmentally ethical behaviour into the community, it's that space that will have to transform."

The mosque was designed with Islamic and local architectural traditions in mind, said architect Julia Barfield of Marks Barfield Architects, responsible for iconic structures such as the London Eye observation wheel on the Thames.

The building "lifts spirits", she said, marrying ornate Islamic geometry with indigenous English materials.

The central timber lattice echoes the Gothic vaulting at nearby King's College Chapel, she said, while the golden dome punctuates the skyline of lean university spires.

It is "essential" that more is done to turn buildings green, said Barfield, adding: "I don't think there's any alternative, we've all got to do this - there's really no option."

<http://news.trust.org/item/20190522224451-fawmj/>

May 24, 2019

Cardinal Turkson on Fourth Anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'*

ZENIT

Profound Concerns of Many Scientists and Experts

The following is the Message of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, to the scientific community on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical [*Laudato si'*](#):

Message

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen of the scientific community,

Some time ago, Pope Francis received some of your colleges, led by the French climatologist Jean Jouzel, a long-serving member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). They shared the profound concerns of many scientists, experts in the field, regarding the current climate crisis, caused by man's interference in nature.

In 2015 I published the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*,^[1] moving from concerns about the “cracks in the planet that we inhabit” (LS 163) and hoping to “enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3). Its publication was intended to encourage the work of the COP 21 Summit, which led to the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change, aiming to maintain the average increase in the planet's surface temperature “well below 2°C” and to “intensify efforts” to limit the increase to 1.5°C. The IPCC Special Report for 2018 on the logic and feasibility of the 1.5°C limit^[2] warns us that we have only around a decade to limit this global warming.

The 1.5°C threshold is a critical physical threshold, inasmuch as it would still enable the avoidance of many destructive impacts of climate changes caused by man, such as the regression of the main glaciers and the destruction of the majority of tropical coral reefs. In particular, it would probably safeguard our common home from becoming a “greenhouse”. With global warming of around 1°C confirmed since the Industrial Revolution, we are already witnessing the grave impact of climate changes on people, in terms of extreme meteorological conditions, such as drought, flooding, rising sea level, devastating storms, and ferocious fires. The climate crisis is reaching unprecedented proportions. Therefore, the urgency could not be greater.

The 1.5°C threshold is also a moral threshold: it is the last chance to save all those countries and many millions of vulnerable people who live in coastal regions. It is the poor who pay the highest price of climate changes. “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (LS 48). We must respond with courage to “the increasingly desperate cries of the earth and its poor”.^[3]

It is useful to assume that 1.5 ° C is also a religious threshold. The world we are destroying is the gift of God to humanity, precisely that house sanctified by the divine Spirit (Ruah) at the beginning of creation, the place where he pitched his tent among us (cf. *Jn* 1: 14). As Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit”,^[4] but rather it is God’s creation. In 2001, the American bishops underlined that “if we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation”.^[5] It is a profound truth that we learn above all from our indigenous brothers and sisters: “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” (LS 146).

The alarming call of scientists to act to take care of our common home that is coming to pieces is also supported by a very powerful appeal from the young generations, whose future is threatened: “Young people demand change” (LS 13) and there is an active movement of pupils and students rising throughout the world. At World Youth Day in Panama this year, the young launched “Generation *Laudato si*” and published a powerful manifesto, which challenges communities of faith and civil society to a radical ecological conversion in action.^[6] They ask us to implement the urgent transition to renewable energy sources in line with the Paris Agreement and put an end to the era of fossil fuels, echoing the appeals of bishops throughout the world.^[7] In recent months, young people have become increasingly explicit, as we see, for example, in the strikes for the environment. Their frustration and anger towards our generation is clear. We risk robbing them of their future, as well as “leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth” (LS 161).

It is time to organize an intervention. As stated in *Laudato si*, “the effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now”(LS 161). We will all have to make a radical change in our lifestyle: the use of energy, consumption, transport, industrial production, construction, agriculture, etc. Each of us is called to act. But we must also take action together, starting with governments and institutions, families and people: we need all hands on deck. “Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed” (LS 14) to address this crisis and defeat the powerful interests that hinder our meaningful collective response to this unprecedented threat against our civilization.

It is right to join the scientists and the young in urging our human family, especially those who are in positions of political and economic power, to undertake drastic measures to change course. We must “one world with a common plan” (LS 164). We need to appeal to political leaders to be far more courageous and to listen to the dramatic cry raised by the scientific community and the climate youth movement. “Governments are obliged to honor the commitments they made” in 2015.^[8] World leaders attending the United Nations Summit on Climate next September 2019 must produce solid national plans for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, especially “those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most” (LS 169). To tackle this alarming climate crisis, we need to mobilize will and decision, as well as economic resources on a large scale. It was done during the financial crisis of 2007-2008 to save the banks: is it not possible to do it again now to save our common home, the future of our children and future generations?

There is still hope, great hope, and there is still the time to act and avoid the worst effects of climate changes. “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (LS 205). We must “revive” the best resources of our human nature, the innate virtues of love, compassion, generosity, and altruism. The greatest resource of man is that the Lord of life does not abandon him, He does not leave him alone, because He is joined definitively with him and with the earth, and His love always leads to finding new roads (see LS 245).

24 May 2019, on the Fourth Anniversary of Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si’*

Peter K.A. Cardinal Turkson

Prefect

[1] See http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

[2] *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C* (8 October 2018) (in: <https://www.cmcc.it/ipccitalia/ipcc-special-report-global-warming-of-1-5-c/>).

[3] Francis, Address to the participants in the International Conference on the occasion of the third Anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* (Vatican City), 6 July 2018 (in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/july/documents/papa-francesco_20180706_terzoanniversario-laudatosi.html).

[4] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 22 February 2007, no. 92 (in http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html).

[5] United States Catholic Bishops’ Conference (USCCB) *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, 15 giugno 2001 (in <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm>).

[6] *World Youth Day 2019: Manifesto of Youth for the common home: ecological conversion in action* (Panama), 21 January 2019

(in <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/dam/laityfamilylife/Pdf/manifesto-%20def.pdf>).

[7] World Bishops’ Appeal to COP21 Negotiating Parties, October 2015 (<https://www.cidse.org/newsroom/press-release-catholic-church-worldwide-calls-for-urgent-climate-action-and-for-a-major-break-through-at-the-cop-21-paris-conference.html>).

[8] Francis, Message for World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation “Show mercy to our common home”, 1 September 2016 (in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html).

<https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-turkson-on-fourth-anniversary-of-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si/>

May 24, 2019

Laudato Si' Generation rallies Catholic youth for climate strikes

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

This article appears in the [Our Common Home](#) feature series. [View the full series.](#)

Hundreds of thousands of youth and young adults across the globe planned to swap classrooms for protests Friday as part of the latest major school strike against inaction by government leaders on climate change.

The second global climate strike, following the first in March that drew an estimated 1.4 million people, will include a growing number of young Catholics through a new youth-centered group called [Laudato Si' Generation](#).

It is one of numerous groups organizing the strikes, which happen to align with the fourth anniversary of the publication date of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology, "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)." (The papal document was [officially released](#) June 18, 2015.)

Nearly 1,600 strikes in 118 countries were planned for the day, according to Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swede who sparked the [#FridaysForFuture](#) climate strikes when she started her solo protest last August. Since then, she has addressed world leaders, including a [brief moment with Pope Francis](#), who encouraged Thunberg to continue her work for climate action.

Laudato Si' Generation has organized as many as 50 strikes set for May 24. The youth organization is calling on the Catholic Church to become a leader on climate change by developing sustainability plans and committing to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions that continue to warm the planet.

"We want people to be fully aware of *Laudato Si'* and what Pope Francis is asking us to do. Not only to pray and reflect but take action as well," said 31-year-old Analisa Ramsahai, a member of Laudato Si' Generation and one of the organizers of climate strikes planned in Trinidad and Tobago.

Kids take the lead

On the small Caribbean island nation off the coast of Venezuela, more than 400 children ranging from ages 7 to 18 from 20 Catholic schools were expected to march to the home of Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon of the Port of Spain Archdiocese. There, they planned to deliver a petition asking for ecological curricula and eco-friendly policies around waste and food in their schools.

Representatives for the archbishop, who is out of the country, and the apostolic nuncio were set to receive the petition. Ramsahai, a project coordinator with the [Franciscan Institute for Personal and Family Development](#), a ministry of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, told NCR that church leaders on Trinidad and Tobago have been supportive of the march and many were planning to attend.

"This is a reality that we're all facing — climate crisis, ecological crisis. And children, they're the ones who are going to feel the full brunt of it. And they have started to take the lead. They have started to take action," she said.

In Seattle, members of Laudato Si' Generation were set to join other area environmental groups, including [Extinction Rebellion](#), in their own march to the city's landmark Space Needle. There, they would hold an 11-minute "die-in" — symbolizing the 11 years that climate scientists have said remain to cut greenhouse gas emissions nearly in half in order to put the planet on pace to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), and to avoid catastrophic threats to life that come with higher levels of warming.

That [forecast](#), from the United Nations climate science body, has energized environmental groups, and especially young activists, to increase pressure on world leaders to ramp up climate action plans to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. In addition to the climate strikes, the Sunrise Movement in the United States has [elevated climate change as a prominent issue](#) heading into the 2020 presidential election.

"Others have the greatest responsibility for causing the climate crisis, but my generation and those that follow will bear the burden of its consequences," Maria Agustina Rodriguez Ortiz de Rozas, a Laudato Si' Generation member organizing a strike in Argentina, said in a statement. "Today, we say *no more*. We're taking back our future, and this is only the beginning."

"Young people are facing an uncertain future," Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, coordinator of the ecology and creation sector of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said in offering support of the strikes.

"We encourage decision-makers everywhere to listen to young Catholics' call for urgent and ambitious policy changes to secure a 1.5-degree future," said Kureethadam, author of the recent book [The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si'](#).

A youth manifesto

The climate strikes represent the first major initiative of Laudato Si' Generation, the recently launched youth arm of the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#).

Laudato Si' Generation already has a membership of approximately 2,000 Catholics worldwide, primarily between the ages of 15 and 30. It holds regular webinars and members can join working groups focused on outreach, activism, spirituality and communication.

Marisa Vertrees, organizing director for Global Catholic Climate Movement, said that the idea of a youth branch came from a growing recognition from the movement's own work as well as World Youth Day and the synod on youth.

"There was so much energy among Catholic youth and young adults in taking action on the climate crisis, and so much of a need for them to be given a voice," she said.

Two days before [World Youth Day](#) opened in Panama in January, 400 young Catholics gathered to discuss the pope's social encyclical on the environment. That conference [produced](#) a youth climate [manifesto](#) later presented to Cardinal Luis Tagle, archbishop of Manila, Philippines, and head of Caritas Internationalis.

It also marked the start of Laudato Si' Generation.

"Our future and the future of those who will come after us is in grave danger," the manifesto begins. "For a long time, humanity has embarked in an irresponsible path of environmental destruction that still makes our present precarious and affects the future."

The youth climate manifesto calls for "ongoing ecological conversion" at all levels of the church, including steps toward promoting simple and sustainable lifestyles, for ecclesial structures to commit to 100% renewable energy by 2030 and to adopt ethical investment guidelines that would divest church finances from fossil fuels.

It also calls on world leaders to meet the Paris Agreement goal of holding global warming to 1.5 C by phasing out fossil fuels; to take concerted steps by 2030 to protect a third of the planet's ecosystems and to provide universal and fair access to drinking water; and to implement the [U.N. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

'We all can start caring'

Apart from the climate strikes, education and awareness have been an early focus for Laudato Si' Generation. It is working to develop guidelines for setting up groups on school campuses around the pope's encyclical.

In addition to the strike, young Catholics in Seattle are sending a letter to their bishops and heads of Catholic schools requesting that *Laudato Si'* be included more fully in curricula and that faith-based ecological programs are offered in schools.

Luke Henkel, an outreach coordinator for Laudato Si' Generation and chair of the creation care team at Seattle's St. James Cathedral, said that while there's a lot of activity in church groups, the power of the encyclical remains somewhat untapped. "There's little awareness of the revolutionary way that the Catholic Church is treating the environmental crisis because of *Laudato Si'*," he said.

"It doesn't seem like anybody's really connecting the fact that this is where we can really make good change by educating ourselves on what Catholic social teaching is regarding the environment," Henkel, 29, told NCR.

Ramsahai said that while many young people in the Caribbean are "fully aware of the issue of climate change," especially through increasingly devastating hurricanes and extreme temperatures and rainfall, they are less attuned to Catholic teaching on the environment.

In creation care workshops she has led in classrooms throughout the Caribbean, she often begins by highlighting the creation story in the Book of Genesis and the responsibility God gave to humanity to care for the Earth and its ecosystems, she said. When she ties that to scientific data around climate change or plastic pollution in oceans, "they put two and two together."

Ramsahai said students have embraced finding simple ways to make a difference: using a handkerchief rather than paper napkins, creating craft baskets to carry fruits at the market, and seeking new ways to make a popular frozen juice drink that doesn't involve a disposable plastic bag.

So far, Ramsahai has helped set up a Laudato Si' Generation chapter in St. Lucia and Grenada — which is holding its own climate march May 31 — and there are plans to expand to Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

As Laudato Si' Generation expands, its members recognize they can't accomplish their goals outlined in their manifesto alone.

"We need leadership support from all levels — the government, the church especially, and schools — in order to see this foundation grow into something bigger," Ramsahai said.

For Henkel, a former seminarian for the Divine Word Missionaries, he was inspired by the environmental work he witnessed during his time as a missionary in the Philippines, and the passion in Panama at World Youth Day. The big challenge, he told NCR, is cultivating that same energy in the wider church, particularly in the U.S., "to get church leaders to start caring and then saying, 'Hey, we all can start caring, not just Pope Francis.' "

"If young people are seeing that this is what parish priests are talking about, then they'll perk up," he said. "I guess to say it kind of simply, they'll take this stuff a little more seriously."

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

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/laudato-si-generation-rallies-catholic-youth-climate-strikes>

May 25, 2019

Rabbi Lawrence Troster, Jewish environmental activist, dies at 65

Born in Toronto, Troster, who described himself as an “eco-theologian,” spent summers growing up in Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, where long canoe trips helped instill his love of nature.

By Josefin Dolsten
Jerusalem Post

Rabbi Lawrence Troster, a leading Jewish environmental activist, has died.

Troster was the spiritual leader at Keshet Israel Congregation in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and was involved in a number of Jewish and interfaith environmental initiatives. He also served as rabbinic director for J Street, the liberal Middle East policy group.

He died Friday at the age of 65. An email announcement from his family said he died “after a long illness.”

Troster was the founder and coordinator of Shomrei Breishit: Rabbis and Cantors For the Earth, a member of Al Gore’s Climate Reality Project Leadership Corps, the rabbinic adviser for Hazon and rabbinic fellow for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

In 2005, he was the only rabbi among the 50 invited guests at a two-day international interfaith conference on the environment held in Tehran, Iran. He said at the time that he was wary of the invitation, but that “[i]t was really important for people to see a rabbi in this situation, speaking about the Jewish tradition.”

Troster was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary and taught at a number of Jewish and religious institutions, including his alma mater, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Academy for Jewish Religion, Union Theological Seminary and Drew Theological School. JTS awarded him an honorary doctorate in recognition of his more than 25 years of rabbinic service.

He frequently lectured on and wrote about the religious perspective on environmentalism, bioethics, and Judaism and modern science, including as a contributor to HuffPost.

Born in Toronto, Troster, who described himself as an “eco-theologian,” spent summers growing up in Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, where long canoe trips helped instill his love of nature.

“As [a] Jewish person of faith, I hold deep respect for the fundamental understanding that God, as Creator of the universe, is [the] real Owner of all,” he wrote in 2017, marking the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. “It is also evident from the first chapter of Genesis, and other biblical texts, that God creates, takes care of, and takes pleasure in the diversity of life in the world.”

Troster is survived by his wife, Elaine Kahn, a writer; twin daughters, Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, the deputy director of T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, and Sarah Kahn-Troster, a health policy researcher, and their husbands; three granddaughters and one grandson.

<https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Rabbi-Lawrence-Troster-Jewish-environmental-activist-dies-at-65-590629>

May 27, 2019

Song of Water

By James McGowan
The Dark Mountain Project

The fire at Notre Dame cathedral in Paris last month has sparked a discussion about the contrast between the way our societies respond to the destruction of sacred buildings made by human hands and the ongoing destruction of the living world. In the latest contribution to The Devil's Door, our collection of Dark Mountain writings on the sacred, James McGowan tells the story of what happened when Native Nations attempted to use the laws protecting religious freedom to challenge the destruction of sacred landscapes across the United States.

The roar from the last great waterfall of the Northern Rockies reverberates off the hillsides flanking the Kootenai River. At the foot of the falls, a granite tableau separates the cataract into a network of smaller cascades, allowing visitors to hopscotch across rocks and commune with the mist and rumble generated by the crystalline water. People from the Salish and Kootenai Nations consider these falls to be a sacred site, where the Creator conducts a symphony of water that informs their spirituality, enriches their culture, and bonds their common identity.

Officials from the local electric utility also recognised the immense power of these waters, but what they heard was the sound of money: hydropower to be harnessed and converted into billions of dollars. Their engineers designed a dam that would swallow the falls behind a 4-mile reservoir, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission was ready to rubber stamp the construction permit when a group of traditional medicine people and the Native American Rights Fund filed a motion to stop it. For the tribes, the hydropower plan was an existential matter of life and death. Allowing destruction of the area would break their covenant with the Creator to

guard the land, and without the sacred songs of Kootenai Falls, they would cease to exist as a people.

The conflict ended up in court around the same time that several other Native Nations across the country had brought similar cases seeking protection of their sacred sites under the constitutional guarantee to freedom of religion. Five hundred years after contact between the European and Native Nations in the Americas, these cases highlighted the continuing clash between starkly opposing worldviews on what is considered sacred, and what is not. The lawsuits spiralled all the way up to the US Supreme Court, where the Justices themselves bitterly disputed the concept of land and its web of life as something sacred.

Testimonies given by traditional medicine people in these sacred site cases pointed out that climate change is not the problem, but a symptom of the problem; that species extinction is not the problem, but a symptom of the problem; that in fact all the environmental problems that now threaten the human species are only symptoms of the underlying problem. In half a dozen different court cases across the country, traditional people testified time and again that the air, the water and the land are sacred elements at the core of their religions that must not be desecrated, while the government and business interests made the case that these life-supporting systems can be closed down when there's a financial incentive to do so. One of these perspectives was responsible for maintaining the basic ecological integrity of the continent for 20,000 years. The other has placed the planet's life systems into a death spiral the likes of which have not been seen since the extinction of the dinosaurs 60 million years ago. The First Amendment court cases involving sacred sites crystallised this clash of perspectives and revealed the problem underlying the symptoms of environmental destruction.

Until 1924, the spiritual traditions of the Native Nations were illegal. Ceremonies went underground because medicine people could be jailed for performing them. Formal recognition didn't come until 1978 with passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) which states that 'it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise traditional religions [...] Including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.' Yet soon after AIRFA passed through Congress, the government challenged whether the Act had the power to stop destruction of sacred sites by various moneymaking schemes.

The first case was brought by a descendant of Sequoyah, the Cherokee genius who single-handedly created a syllabary for his language in 1809. Sequoyah was born in an area of the Little Tennessee River Valley that holds Cherokee sacred sites, graves and the ancestral capital of their nation known as Chota. The Smithsonian Institution called the valley 'undoubtedly the most interesting archaeological section in the entire Appalachian district.' Fishermen recognised the river as the best trout fishing water east of the Mississippi. Biologists knew it as home to the snail-darter, a nearly extinct fish species. Farmers knew the valley as high-producing, top grade farmland. All of these resources and human rights were threatened by the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) plan to build the Tellico Dam and submerge 16,000 acres of land.

A cost-benefit analysis showed that the dam would lose a million dollars a year, but an alliance of land speculators, local politicians, and pork-barrel Congressional committees attached a secretive rider to an appropriations bill that illegally circumvented the analysis and the Endangered Species Act. As a last ditch effort to save the Cherokee homelands, Mr Sequoyah and two Bands of the Cherokee Nation brought a suit in federal court to block construction of the dam. Their lawyers stated that ‘the flooding of the river valley would, in an immense and immeasurable way, infringe upon the basic right to practice the ancient Cherokee religion.’ An affidavit from the Cherokee medicine people stated that the river and adjoining river valley were ‘not merely the symbol of something sacred, or merely a place to bring forth memories of past persons or events. It is *itself sacred, itself* the source of sacred power.’

For the TVA, there was nothing sacred about the 38,000 acres it had acquired by displacing 700 farms in the area. Lawyers for the Authority claimed that Cherokee property rights had been expunged by 125 years of non-possession; they didn’t mention that this ‘non-possession’ was in truth an illegal dispossession that started when gold was discovered there in 1828. President Andrew Jackson defied the Supreme Court to ensure access to the gold, and he ordered the military to forcibly remove the Cherokee from their land, sending them on the infamous death march known as the Trail of Tears. Of the 16,000 people who were forced at gunpoint from their homes, 4,000 would be murdered or die from starvation and frostbite on the 1,000-mile walk westward. A few Cherokee escaped and remained as fugitives in the valley. Many others who survived the trek to Oklahoma would return on pilgrimages to perform their spiritual observances below the radar of the local authorities.

Despite the compelling history and threat to religious freedom posed by the dam, Judge Robert Taylor agreed with the TVA, and dismissed the Cherokee complaint because ‘plaintiffs claim no legal property interest in the land in question.’ Instead of recognising their position as religious claimants with constitutionally-protected rights, the court resigned the Cherokee to the role of trespassers on their own ancient sacred sites. It didn’t matter that they predated the United States with a highly developed society by several thousand years. The current deed to the land was all that mattered. Lawyer Brian Brown wrote that ‘the Cherokee had proven that the dam would halt their ceremonies, obliterate the physical vestiges of their history and culture, and destroy the sacred reality at the heart of Cherokee religion, but the TVA asserted that the Constitution afforded no protection for religious belief and practice regarding lands unless the plaintiffs owned the property.’ The Cherokee appealed the decision, but the TVA had responded quickly to Judge Taylor’s decision, and by the time the Appeals Court issued its opinion, the River Valley had disappeared beneath the waters of a completed Tellico dam.

The public controversy over Tellico marked a crucial turning point in American attitudes toward dam building in general. Up until that moment, new dams had represented economic progress and technological prowess. It took a breach of the Constitution, a violation of the Endangered Species Act, the submergence of Chota and defacement of Cherokee sacred lands to permanently end the era of dam building in the United States. The process is now in full reverse, with 72 dams being removed in 2016 alone. Many rivers are slowly being restored, and some of the fish and wildlife are returning. There are currently no plans to take down the Tellico dam, but its removal and the return of the sacred Cherokee homeland would be a first step toward reparations for one of the worst crimes in American history.

‘Before any resolution to American history can occur, a reconciliation must be affected between the spiritual owner of the land – the American Indian – and the political owner of the land – the American white man,’ Sioux Professor Vine Deloria wrote. ‘Guilt and accusations cannot continue to revolve in a vacuum without some effort at resolution.’

After the *Sequoyah* decision, three other First Amendment legal challenges were brought in rapid succession to halt government actions against sacred lands:

In *Badoni v. Higginson*, the Navajo sought to save the soaring stone arch known as Rainbow Bridge from flooding due to construction of the Glen Canyon dam.

In *Wilson v. Block*, the Hopi and Navajo joined forces in an effort to prevent desecration of their revered San Francisco Peaks by the expansion of a ski resort.

In *Frank Fools Crow v. Tony Gullet*, spiritual leaders from the Lakota and Tsistsistas petitioned the courts to protect their ancient prayer site, Bear Butte, from defacement by tourist facilities.

Plaintiffs in each of these cases testified to ‘the spiritual character of all beings within the community of life, and evoked patterns of thought, language, and behavior that give striking witness to a perception of the natural world as sacred,’ Brown said. Time after time, tribal members testified that their worldview recognises the Earth as a numinous presence upon which the fate of the human species depends. On the other side, government lawyers relied on the dominant paradigm of Earth as a soulless material resource, disconnected from the fate of the human species. In the end, none of the courts were willing to protect the religious traditions of the people whose lands they occupied.

The final legal standoff unfolded amidst the ancient redwood forests of the Pacific Northwest, which many consider the crown jewel of North American ecosystems. Even for unbelievers, the overwhelming scale and beauty of 2,000 year-old trees towering 350 feet overhead silences mental chatter and raises the volume on the ineffable. The local Yurok, Karok, Tolowa and Hupa peoples possess a distinct cosmology and an entire way of life centred on listening to that voice. While much of their spiritual life-way remains mystical and secret, they have publicly revealed that their dances, ceremonies and prayers are directed toward maintaining the stability of the Earth and the renewal of all life. A recent scientific study confirmed what these people have long known – redwood forests exert a strong stabilising effect on the climate because they store at least three times more carbon above ground than any other type of forest.

Like the Cherokees before them, tribes of the Northwest faced genocide when gold was discovered in the pristine streams that lace through the ancient forests. Their homelands were invaded by 100,000 desperate gold miners in the 1850s who brazenly claimed over one million acres of tribal lands through coercion, massacres, kidnapping, mass enslavements and legalised ‘Indian hunts.’ When the army finally intervened and removed all of the area’s tribes to small reservations, several dozen people managed to flee and return to their original territories along the Klamath River where they faithfully continued their religious observances to keep the world in balance.

‘We pray for the health and well being of all things, we sing, we dance, we heal the community to heal the land, we heal the land to heal the community. All of the community. Everything. Together,’ said Dr Cutch Risling Baldy, Yurok/Karuk/Hupa, and Assistant Professor at Humboldt State University.

The murderous frenzy of the gold rush ran its course by 1855, but then a second gold rush began when the colonists started cutting down the majestic trees. Public subsidies for roads and infrastructure quickly turned Northern California into the lumber capital of the world, and an environmental catastrophe where 96% of irreplaceable old growth forests were clear-cut and reduced to scarred, barren hillsides. Without the extensive root network holding the earth in place, erosion reached up to 22 tons of soil per acre per year, suffocating rivers and streams that are a critical spawning ground for the Pacific salmon and steelhead trout.

One of the final sections slated for logging was known as the ‘High Country’ because its rocky peaks rise up to 7,000 feet. Since time out of mind, tribal members have gone there to pray and seek guidance, especially the medicine people who lead ceremonies. Even approaching the high country is itself considered a religious act. Any would-be pilgrim must undertake a ten-day purification period and receive a vision indicating that the forces present within the forest sanction the visit. The tribes hoped that AIRFA would protect the priceless ecosystem and irreplaceable old growth trees, but with a stumpage value of \$50 billion, the odds were stacked against them.

The Forest Service fulfilled its initial responsibilities to AIRFA by commissioning a report on the impact of road building in the High Country. The resulting ‘Theodoratus Report’ presented interviews with 166 tribal representatives who all warned against using the word sacred to refer to specific locales, but rather to understand that the High Country is considered to be sacred in its totality. ‘Although specific religious sites are identified within this region, the entirety of the region possesses a generalized sanctity which is necessary for the proper use of the specific sacred sites.’ The Report criticised the ignorance of the Forest Service regarding the area’s basic physical features, history and religious significance. It verified the High Country as the seat for ‘one of the great flowerings of Native American culture anywhere in the United States, and of signal importance to national culture.’ In a point crucial to the legal argument, the report said a ‘mental shift’ was required from thinking of the sacred sites as simply the locations for prayers and rituals, to that of a holy reality that gives meaning to those activities. It concluded that the Forest Service proposal would violate AIRFA because ‘the intrusions would be destructive of the very core of Northwest religious beliefs and practices.’

Despite outcries from fishermen, scientists, and grassroots environmental groups, the Forest Service decided to defy the report it had commissioned by pressing forward with the plan to build a logging road directly through the most important sacred sites in the High Country. The tribes tried every avenue to stop the plan for the Gasquet-Orleans road, known as the “G-O” road. After every potential remedy proved fruitless, they filed suit against the government. The Forest Service pointed to the precedent of earlier court rulings and claimed that since the land belonged to the government, it had the right to extract whatever resources they wanted from the land. The very inconvenient history of how the Forest Service had come to own that land was once again swept under the rug.

Judge Stanley Weigel of the Northern District Court of California issued his decision in May of 1983. He found that the Forest Service road would violate the tribes' constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of religion. Weigel characterized the Forest Service plan as a desecration of revered land, stating that its solitude, quiet and pristine environment to be crucial to 'emotional and spiritual exchange with the Creator.' He ordered that the Forest Service permanently stop construction of the road and any timber harvesting in the High Country. The decision marked the first time that a court had sided with a Native Nation against the government to protect sacred lands. 'For the Yurok, Karuk, and Tolowa peoples, the High Country constitutes the center of the spiritual world,' his opinion states, 'it is also a priceless historical heritage for the entire nation.'

The Forest Service appealed the decision to the Ninth Circuit Court, which upheld Judge Weigel's ruling. These two landmark victories should have allowed all the Native Nations to begin protecting the heart of their traditional cultures with the force of law. But the victories posed a high-stakes threat to the Forest Service position as landlord over millions of acres of land that had been taken from the tribes and held under its jurisdiction. Richard Lyng, Supervisor of the Forest Service, petitioned the US Supreme Court to hear the case. *Lyng vs. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association* was the first time that the highest court in the land would hear an argument about the holiness of the American landscape itself.

Following a long history of precedents, the Supreme Court has set up a process that has to be followed before it will take the extraordinary measure of permitting a violation of the free exercise of religion. First, the Court must determine that a governmental action would interfere with the belief or practice of religion. If so, then the government has to prove a compelling state interest of the highest order that cannot be satisfied by any other means. In the *Lyng* case, the Court threw out its own rulebook and refused to adhere to the two-step process in what Justice William Brennan called an 'indefensible abdication' of judicial responsibility.

In the end, the Court voted 3 to 5 to reverse both of the lower court rulings and permit the government to proceed with its 'development' plan. Justice Brennan wrote that the case 'represents yet another stress point in the longstanding conflict between two disparate cultures – the dominant western culture, which views land in terms of ownership and use, and that of Native Americans, in which concepts of private property are not only alien, but contrary to a belief system that holds land sacred.' Justice Sandra Day O'Connor defended the dominant paradigm of land as property by stating in her majority report that even though the Forest Service might 'virtually destroy the Indians' ability to practice their religion,' they deserved no constitutional protection. 'Whatever rights the Indians may have to use the area,' she wrote, 'those rights do not divest the government of its right to use what is, after all, its land.' Justice Brennan pointed out that the ruling was 'cruelly surreal' in that 'the only religious freedom it granted would be to protect the belief that their religion will be destroyed. In marked contrast to traditional western religions, the belief systems of Native Americans do not rely on doctrines, creeds, or dogmas. The site specific nature of Indian religious practice derives from the Native American perspective that the land itself is a sacred, living being, with specific sites possessing different spiritual properties and significance.'

Facing destruction of their culture, and in their view, the destabilisation of planet Earth, the tribes made a last ditch effort by petitioning the Organization of American States to investigate the

logging plan as a violation of human rights. The US government may have been wishing to avoid international embarrassment when it placed the High Country under strict protection as part of the Smith River National Recreation. The G-O road was never built, and the High Country stands as a preserved oasis amidst clear-cut forests, where World Renewal ceremonies continue to this day.

The Kootenai case was resolved in an entirely different way. The tribe had a charismatic spokesman in medicine man Pat Lefthand, who thought that Kootenai Falls could speak for itself. He invited the judge to accompany him on a personal encounter with the site, and as the two men walked beside the river, Pat recounted his tribe's history and described some of their spiritual practices. Then he suggested that the judge sit on one of the rocks below the falls and contemplate the beauty that surrounded him. The lawyer Steve Moore, who represented the tribe along with Walter Echohawk, said that 'there's an irrefutable presumption that a license will be granted by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In the past 40 years, only three applications out of thousands have been denied.' Yet in that moment of listening to the waters that had inspired countless generations of traditional people, the judge had a change of heart. Upon returning to the courtroom, he refused to grant the utility's permit to build the dam.

When Europeans landed in the Americas, they hauled along their baggage of holy books, supernatural ideas, and the sacred concept of private property. They were met by people who embraced their ecosystems as manifestations of the divine that were far beyond human ownership. Vine Deloria writes that 'industrial civilization might succeed in making the Earth uninhabitable for humans because we have downgraded the real world in favor of a supernatural world.' It has taken a few centuries, but scientists and traditional medicine people now find themselves on the same page, with both groups agreeing on the primacy of the real, observable world of air, water and land. At the same time, voices reasserting the sanctity of the natural world have begun to re-emerge from the traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The priest and scholar Thomas Berry writes that we need 'a conversion experience deep in the psychic structure of the human. An experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process.'

Whether the US constitution is capable of protecting ancient religions that guard the land remains an open question. The answer may emerge if Americans in the mainstream culture can begin relating to the spirit of their particular places, as opposed to bringing foreign spiritual practices to those places. The traditional life-ways of the Native Nations based on observations of natural phenomena have persisted throughout centuries of oppression, and remain to this day as guideposts for our imperilled civilization. At this late hour, as wildfires ravage the west, floods inundate the south and east coasts, and heat waves stifle the cities, the people and the courts would do well to listen to them.

<https://dark-mountain.net/song-of-water/>

May 28, 2019

Pope Francis on climate change: Time is of the essence

Pope Francis tells finance ministers they have “the responsibility of working to achieve the goals that your governments have adopted” to combat climate change.

Vatican News

At a discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope Francis described climate change as “an issue of great importance for humanity and the whole of creation”.

The discussion brought together finance ministers from various countries to reflect on the theme “Climate Change and New Evidence from Science, Engineering, and Policy”.

Profits valued over persons

Pope Francis lamented that, “We live at a time when profits and losses seem to be more highly valued than lives and death, and when a company’s net worth is given precedence over the infinite worth of our human family”. On the contrary, “Today’s global interdependence obliges us to think in terms of one world with a common plan”, and he called on finance ministers to “work to achieve the goals” agreed on by governments in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement COP21.

"The signs are not good"

The Holy Father sounded a dire warning about the current state of affairs. “The signs today are not good”, he said, pointing to declining investment in clean energy and a rise in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Citing leading climatologists and experts, Pope Francis said, “Their message was clear and insistent. We need to act decisively to put an end to all emissions of greenhouse gases by mid-century at the very latest, and to do even more than that”.

Specifically, Pope Francis called on ministers to commit to several specific goals:

- to value what is important, not what is superfluous;
- to correct our national accounts and our business accounts, so as to stop engaging in activities that are destroying our planet;
- to put an end to global dependency on fossil fuels;
- to open a new chapter of clean and safe energy, that utilizes, for example, renewable resources such as wind, sun and water;

- above all, to act prudently and responsibly in our economies to actually meet human needs, promote human dignity, help the poor and be set free of the idolatry of money that creates so much suffering.

Waiting for decisive action

“Before all else”, the Pope said, “We must recognize the ledger of life itself, of human dignity and survival”. He said it is his “prayerful hope that, as stewards of the world’s finances, you will agree upon a common plan that accords with climate science, the latest in clean energy engineering, and above all the ethics of human dignity”.

Pope Francis told the finance ministers, “Time is of the essence. We await your decisive action for the sake of all humanity.”

Click the link to read the full text the [ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS](#) at the "Climate Change and New Evidence from Science, Engineering, and Policy" Meeting with Finance Ministers from Various Nations.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-05/pope-francis-on-climate-change-time-is-of-the-essence.html>

May 29, 2019

What Conservation Efforts Can Learn from Indigenous Communities

By Annie Sneed
Scientific American

A major U.N.-backed report says that nature on indigenous peoples’ lands is degrading less quickly than in other areas

A kaleidoscopic diversity of Earth’s plants and animals underpins human existence but is under major threat from the environmental degradation wrought by human activities from mining to agriculture. A million species face extinction—many within decades—without major changes to the way we interact with nature, according to a United Nations–backed [report](#) released earlier this month.

But there is a bright spot: this decline is happening at a slower rate on indigenous peoples’ lands, according to the report, which was compiled by a panel called the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Its authors and other conservation experts say the world should not only draw lessons from those and other local communities’ environmental stewardship but that scientists and policy makers need to support and partner with them in order to stem the tide of biodiversity loss.

“On average, they are doing a better job of managing natural resources and environmental hazards like species decline and pollution,” says Pamela McElwee, one of the report’s lead authors and an associate professor of human ecology at Rutgers University. “This is a watershed moment in acknowledging that indigenous and local communities play really important roles in maintaining and managing biodiversity and landscapes that the rest of us can learn from.”

Stewards of Biodiversity

The report says at least a quarter of our planet’s land is owned, used, occupied or managed by indigenous peoples. And that includes 35 percent of terrestrial areas with very low human impacts, as well as approximately 35 percent of lands under formal protection. The numbers would rise even higher if groups the report designates as “local communities”—considered nonindigenous, but with strong ties to the land through livelihood and other factors—were included. “We have always been saying that if you really look at it, indigenous peoples manage very large areas of biodiversity. But to have governments accept that, and to make it one of the major findings of the report, is quite significant,” says Joji Carino, who is [Ibaloi-Igorot](#) from the Philippines’ Cordilleras Highlands and a senior policy adviser of the Forest Peoples Programme. This nonprofit human rights organization works with indigenous peoples, particularly in tropical forest countries.

The report found that indigenous and local communities contribute in many significant ways to biodiversity. By combining wild and domestic species in gardens, for example, they have created habitats that are much more diverse and species-rich than typical agricultural landscapes—which are often vast fields with acre upon acre of the same crop. “In some cases, there are 300 or 500 species in a garden,” says Zsolt Molnár, a coordinating lead author of the IPBES global assessment and an ethnoecologist at the MTA Center for Ecological Research in Hungary. Many indigenous and local communities actively manage their lands, such as through traditional burning practices that promote biodiversity in places including Australia. They also carry out ecological restoration of degraded lands, such as in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, where indigenous communities have been involved in restoring shellfish populations and native plant species.

Indigenous peoples and local communities also play an important role in long-term monitoring of ecosystems. This is critical, especially because some of these groups live in remote, hard-to-reach areas, such as the Arctic or Amazon forest. “It’s really [these communities] that are collecting the data, often through everyday experiences, so they can report back trends for species, population numbers over time, interactions between species, noticeable declines,” McElwee says. “That monitoring role can be really important, particularly where we don’t have a long-term scientific presence.” For example, indigenous communities in the semipolar regions of the U.S. and Canada have collaborated with those countries on the [Local Environmental Observer network](#), which collects observations on everything from temperatures to wildlife sightings.

Often, though, scientists and governments have not recognized—or have even denigrated—the contributions of indigenous and local communities to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health. In Hungary, for instance, traditional herders had long allowed livestock to graze grasslands, which helped promote biodiversity by maintaining the balance of plant species. But

when the country established national parks several decades ago, government authorities often discouraged, restricted or even outright banned traditional grazing on grasslands. “The problem was that science had no understanding of traditional herding and its impacts,” Molnár says. It is only over the last couple decades that government authorities and scientists have recognized herders’ crucial role in grassland management and have started reintroducing and supporting traditional grazing in the parks.

A Different View of Nature

Indigenous and local communities tend to succeed at conservation for a number of reasons, say experts such as Eduardo Brondízio, co-chair of the IPBES global assessment and an anthropologist at Indiana University Bloomington. These communities have long histories with their lands, which have provided sustenance in a very direct and intimate way. “When you understand the potential uses and the values of hundreds of species, you see a forest differently than if you don’t recognize that,” he says. Social norms and rules can also help communities regulate their natural resources. “It’s about [viewing] the landscape not only from the perspective of just agriculture or ranging,” Brondízio notes. “Instead of focusing on a single management issue, they look at the function of landscapes and what is important to keep in terms of connectivity, how different habitats can be managed to complement each other.”

They also tend to have a deeper understanding of local ecosystems and their dynamics, and this can help make better-informed management decisions. “Community-based institutions are often more successful than government policies or institutions (like formal protected areas) simply because they are closer to the ground and can respond more quickly to changes or threats,” McElwee says.

In addition, many indigenous and local communities tend to have a reciprocal relationship with nature, rather than viewing nature as existing to serve humans—as much of Western culture has historically regarded things. “The institutions, the cultural values, the way of living and the way you see nature itself—as [inseparable] from your social life and identity—that creates a different view of what to use, how to use and how to deal with the tradeoffs of use,” Brondízio says. As McElwee notes, “Even if we don’t acknowledge it, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we produce—it all depends on healthy ecosystems. That is a lesson we can learn from indigenous peoples and local communities who know this already, and who are actively conserving and managing lands.”

Experts say indigenous and local knowledge is—and will be—a critical part of protecting the planet’s biodiversity and the overall health of our ecosystems. This means governments and scientists need to be allies with these communities by amplifying their voices, including them in scientific assessments, recognizing territorial rights and creating partnerships between scientists and indigenous and local communities. “One of the big points is that governments really have to respect our knowledge, values and innovations,” Carino says. “As well as recognize land tenure systems, access rights, and so on.”

At the same time, many of these communities and their lands face immense threats. They are dealing with pressures from encroaching infrastructure, agriculture, mining, logging and other

activities that also endanger biodiversity. There are internal pressures as well, Brondízio says. “Poverty is a major issue among indigenous and local communities,” he explains, adding that this can put pressure on their natural resources or allow outsiders to exploit communities.

Standard conservation practices can present a threat too, experts including Molnár and Carino say. “There are many bad examples where indigenous territories were appropriated by the government, declared a protected area, and indigenous peoples were translocated or just simply killed,” explains Molnár, pointing to the example of the Ogiek, who were [evicted from their homes](#) on Mount Elgon in Kenya. “If we want indigenous peoples to become allies in the protection of biodiversity, then we have to respect their rights,” he says. Carino agrees. “Really, the whole way of conservation in the future needs to be rethought,” she says. “It has to be conservation with respect for human rights of the peoples who are living there, who are managing these areas.”

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-conservation-efforts-can-learn-from-indigenous-communities/>

June 7, 2019

How all religious faiths advocate for environmental protection

United Nations Environment

Science and religion are often thought of as being at odds on many issues. On the question of the environment, however, there's widespread agreement.

From Buddhism to Christianity to Hinduism to Islam, various faiths acknowledge the need for environmental stewardship and their holy texts urge adherents to be caretakers of the Earth and its biodiversity.

On 31 May, the United Religions Initiative, Africa and the All African Conference of Churches in collaboration with UN Environment organized an Interfaith World Environment Day celebration in Nairobi, Kenya.

The celebration called for action on the theme “Faiths for Earth—We stand together to save Mother Earth and Together we can Beat Air Pollution”. It also promoted the **Green Rule** (treat nature as you would like to be treated).

“Without air there is no life and polluted air has become an invisible killer. Annually, about 7 million people die as a direct result of poor air quality. We need to act, and communicate, about the environmental challenges we face and how we can fix them in order to meet our Sustainable Development Goals,” said Gary Lewis, Director of Policy and Programme Division at UN Environment.

“About half of the schools on our planet are owned by faith-based institutions, therefore they play a crucial role in arming the society with knowledge about the damage we are doing to our environment and how we can turn things around,” Lewis said.

In November 2017, following a series of initiatives and conventions organized in partnership with faith-based organizations, UN Environment launched the Faith for Earth Initiative. The initiative engages with faith-based organizations and partners with them to collectively achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfill the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

As part of the 2019 celebrations, members of various faiths will plant trees and hold an inter-faith forum for youth on 8 June at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi.

“We are putting the planet under enormous pressure by depleting scarce natural resources and polluting the air and water. Faith-based organizations play a significant role at the global, regional and local level in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution,” said Ambassador Mussie Hailu, Director of Global Partnership, United Religions Initiative.

As the world marks the 45th World Environment Day, the following are eleven quotes from different religious texts which remind us how faith is connected to the environment:

Baha’i: “Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world.” (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 142)

Buddhism: “Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it.” (Dalai Lama, 1990a)

Christianity: “We must treat nature with the same awe and wonder that we reserve for human beings. And we do not need this insight in order to believe in God or to prove his existence. We need it to breathe; we need it for us simply to be.” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 2010)

Confucianism: “... sustainable harmonious relationship between the human species and nature is not merely an abstract ideal, but a concrete guide for practical living.” (International Confucian Ecological Alliance, 2015)

Hinduism: “There is an inseparable bond between man and nature. For man, there cannot be an existence removed from nature.” (Amma, 2011)

Islam: “Devote thyself single-mindedly to the Faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah.” (Qur’an 30:30)

Jainism: "Do not injure, abuse, oppress, enslave, insult, torment, torture, or kill any creature or living being." (Mahavira)

Judaism: “And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food.’” (Gen 1:29)

Shintoism: “I will give over to my child the rice-ears of the sacred garden, of which I partake in the Plain of High Heaven.” (Nihongi II.23)

Sikhism: “You, yourself created the Universe, and You are pleased. . . You, Yourself the bumblebee, flower, fruit and the tree.” (Guru Granth Sahib, Maru Sohele, page 1020)

Taoism: “This original nature is the eternal law. To know the nature’s law is to be enlightened. He who is ignorant of the nature’s law shall act recklessly, and thus will invite misfortune. To know the constant law of nature is to be generous. Being generous, one is impartial. Being impartial, one is the sovereign. Sovereign is the nature itself.” (Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 16)

Air pollution was the theme for [World Environment Day](#) on 5 June 2019. The quality of the air we breathe depends on the lifestyle choices we make every day. Learn more about how air pollution affects you, and what is being done to clean the air. What are you doing to reduce your emissions footprint and [#BeatAirPollution](#)?

The 2019 World Environment Day was hosted by China.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/how-all-religious-faiths-advocate-environmental-protection>

June 10, 2019

Massive Loss of Biodiversity Gives New Urgency to Put Care for Creation Into Action

By Peter Jesserer Smith
National Catholic Register

A new U.N. report on biodiversity loss is propelling the Church to move forward on Benedict XVI and Francis’ call to action to care for creation.

Human beings are looking at a staggering loss of global biodiversity as more than a million species — approximately one out of eight on the planet — are threatened with extinction due to negative human actions, according to a new United Nations report.

But the sober assessment also provides new impetus for Catholics to put into practice the care for creation envisioned by Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on the environment, [Laudato Si](#) (Care for Our Common Home), that should allow human beings and the natural world to thrive together.

“We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide,” stated Sir Robert Watson, the chairman of [The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#), which released its global consensus report after the seventh plenary session concluded May 4 in Paris. He added that there is another path, “only if we start now at every level, from local to global.”

Laudato Si, which has a chapter dedicated to biodiversity, also turned 4 years old May 24, and many Catholics have already been at work to road map a restoration of biodiversity at home and abroad.

Pope Francis stated that “all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” While he called attention to both the Amazon and Congo River basins, Pope Francis stated the obligation to care for creation’s biodiversity was universal and extended into people’s own backyards.

“Each area is responsible for the care of this family,” the Pope stated. He called on people to work toward “developing programs and strategies of protection with particular care for safeguarding species heading towards extinction.”

“The common theme in *Laudato Si* is ‘everything is connected,’ and the U.N. biodiversity report really shows that,” Ricardo Simmonds, environmental justice program consultant for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told the Register.

The U.N. report lists the top drivers of biodiversity loss in descending order as “changes in land and sea use,” “direct exploitation of organisms,” “climate change,” “pollution” and “invasive alien species.”

A Global Challenge

One of the world’s foremost authorities on extinction and how to prevent it, Stuart Pimm, professor of conservation ecology at [Duke University’s Nicholas School of the Environment](#), told the Register that the U.N. report is “serious” and represents a “global consensus of more than a thousand people” that species extinction is happening at far faster levels than such events would naturally. But he does have “hope” that people can take action.

Biodiversity is a global challenge, he said, that affects not only the Amazon. Americans, he said, need to realize many threatened species are concentrated in Hawaii, Florida and the southeastern U.S.

Pimm, who is not Catholic, added that *Laudato Si* was both good on the science and a great place to start for addressing the biodiversity crisis.

“We need to change our mindset about how we think about the world,” he said. As one example, Pimm pointed out that while marine life faces serious challenges from the vast amounts of plastic garbage that is circulating the oceans, marine ecosystems face an even graver threat from

commercial fishing fleets of industrial nations that have decimated the populations of most of the top predators in the sea, such as sharks and tunas.

“We like big, tasty fish, and we’re harvesting them to extinction,” Pimm said.

Without these predators, other fish populations explode, then collapse, and what remains is generally marine life of a size unsuitable for human consumption, putting at risk the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities in developing countries.

Despite this bad news, though, Pimm said there is a “surprising amount of good news” and a “huge amount of progress.” Human beings have shown in the past they can change their ways and help species come back. He said an animal threatened with extinction that makes it on the “U.S. Endangered Species List” has a 99% chance of survival.

“We’ve brought a lot of species back,” Pimm said.

Pimm said the rich nations, which supply the “million-dollar boats” capable of this scale of overfishing, also have the power to help nature rest and replenish. Without waiting for an international agreement, most nations could impose restrictions on commercial fishing within their 200-mile economic exclusion zone and allow the top predators to bounce back.

On land, too, nature struggles to adapt to human environments. Urban sprawl has carved up the range animals need — Pimm pointed out that highways bisect a great deal of wildlife. However, the construction of “[wildlife overpasses](#)” or “wildpasses,” is helping reconnect areas needed to sustain elk, bear and other animal populations that require a large range. The wildpasses, which are prevalent in Europe and have just started to be built in the U.S., also make human travel on the road safer, allowing animals (and even human beings) to cross highways without the risk of getting struck by a vehicle.

Taking Catholic Action

Pope Francis’ teaching in *Laudato Si* builds on the moral framework on human ecology set forth by Benedict XVI in [Caritas in Veritate](#) (*Charity in Truth*). Benedict warned against the “superdevelopment” of rich nations being underpinned by “moral underdevelopment” and then exported to poorer, developing nations.

“The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa,” Benedict taught, saying the Church had a responsibility to defend creation.

“[S]he must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction,” he said.

The consumptive lifestyle of rich nations is both driving pollution and exporting this lifestyle (and its consequences) to other countries. A [2015 Oxfam report](#) indicated that the richest 10% account for half of the world’s carbon emissions. The poorest 50% account for just 10% of carbon emissions.

“This is more about the way the wealthy are living rather than having too many people on the planet,” Simmonds said. “There’s a great disparity between the use of the wealthy and the footprint of those who have less money.”

Developing countries are starting to realize this lifestyle is unsustainable and beginning to backtrack. Malaysia became the most recent country to announce it would be sending plastic waste back to the U.S. and Europe so they can deal with the consequences themselves. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte colorfully threatened to “declare war” on Canada for missing a May 15 deadline to take back its trash.

[According to data](#) collected by the University of Oxford, while the U.S. is the second-largest global producer of plastic waste (behind China), its waste-management practices actually mitigate a lot of pollution flowing into rivers and oceans. Part of that strategy has included exporting plastics for recycling to other countries. But many Southeast Asian countries, with their long coastlines, are overwhelmed with plastic waste. Because they cannot contain it, they contribute to 60% of the plastics polluting the world’s oceans.

China likewise has also told the U.S. and Europe that they will no longer accept any more plastic waste imports for recycling. China accounts for one-third of the global plastic pollution, and the *South China Morning Post* [reported](#) its unregulated recycling business was generating other toxic forms of pollution entering the environment.

“We need to think, ‘How are we living our lives?’” Simmonds said. “That is the call to conscience and message of *Laudato Si*.”

Adrian Flores, the associate director of the Office of Life, Justice and Peace for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, told the Register that the archdiocese is exploring ways to care for creation. Flores pointed out that Los Angeles’ pollution problems are deeply linked to human degradation, as Francis and Benedict have taught. A major contributor to the garbage that flows into the ocean from the Los Angeles River comes from the waste left by the homeless.

The archdiocese has listed [care-for-creation resources](#) on its website for individuals, parishes and communities to access, and they are holding more discussions with other groups to find solutions.

Backyard Biodiversity

Getting to a culture that loves and restores global biodiversity is a project that begins literally in people’s backyards, explained Bill Jacobs, executive director of the [St. Kateri Conservation Center](#) and an ecologist with 25 years’ experience.

Jacobs, who was the interim director of the St. Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine in Fonda, New York, said God must be part of the conversation on biodiversity, because the key to restoring biodiversity is “restoring relationships” between humanity and creation and the God who created all.

The St. Kateri Conservation Center has a “St. Kateri Habitat” program that invites people to restore natural habitats at their homes, in their parishes and in their local communities. Planting native trees and plants in backyards and roadsides can make “little oases” to support biodiversity.

Jacobs said the more people support biodiversity in their own backyards, the more it changes their attitude toward other actions.

Families that reduce their lawns by giving more space to wildflowers can also reduce the amount of fertilizer and weed killer, which takes a toll on native plants and insects, and provide pollination habitats for bees and other insects.

“It seems like a small thing, but it gets people thinking,” he said.

Farms, he added, can mitigate fertilizer runoff through pursuing best land management practices, using a minimum amount of organic fertilizers as needed, and creating wildlife habitats that can catch run-off before it enters into waterways.

Fertilizer runoff is a major challenge to biodiversity, Jacobs explained. Many lakes and waterways are seeing toxic algae blooms due to fertilizer runoff. This greatly weakens an ecosystem and can wipe out native species once invasive species are introduced (sometimes by people who buy exotic pets and then release them into the wild when they get tired of them).

Officials in the Great Lakes are panicked about the expansion of Asian carp into the Great Lakes, which they fear could wipe out a large number of native species still rebounding in the wake of efforts to clean up the industrial pollution of the lakes. And the ecosystem is seeing toxic algae blooms, harmful to human beings and wildlife, as a result of raw sewage and fertilizer flowing from Ohio’s factory-farms into Lake Erie.

Working With Indigenous Peoples

St. Kateri Conservation Center calls itself a “faith-based land trust.” It is working with religious orders and landowners to put what it calls “conservation easements” into the deeds to their land, so they can remain preserved habitats. It also provides a way to make sure the land retains its religious character, such as any shrines or statues built on the landscape.

But preserving or restoring biodiversity also presents an opportunity to work with indigenous peoples. The St. Kateri Conservation Center is looking to enter into strategic partnerships with Native American communities and nations. Duke University’s Pimm also emphasized that working with biodiversity required the involvement of native peoples who have several thousand years of experience-based wisdom in maintaining habitats they depend on for their own thriving.

The USCCB’s Simmonds agreed the Church should work with indigenous peoples, as Pope Francis emphasized, “for the sake of the forests and biodiversity there, because they are the best custodians.”

The U.S. federal park model, he indicated, envisions “pristine wilderness” as having no people in it. Native people in the U.S., who formerly inhabited and took care of these lands, are left with reservations that have too small a land-base to sustain traditional lifestyles and land management. Simmonds explained this is in contrast to South America, where federal parks are vast tracts of land cared for and maintained by indigenous people, living their traditional way of life.

But researchers are recognizing that the indigenous people have a vital role in maintaining forest biodiversity. In the face of multiple horrific wildfires in the Western U.S. and California, researchers are studying how Native American peoples [managed forests](#), preventing the monster wildfires that would otherwise have wiped out their communities as well as wildlife.

For the U.S. Church, following the advice of Pope Francis, working with native nations and communities may not only help heal historic injustices, but also prove to be the linchpin to care for creation effectively.

“Look, if we want to protect the forests, then we have to really protect and allow indigenous peoples to live their lifestyle — that’s the best way to do this,” Simmonds said. “And they can teach us in our superdeveloped culture how to live in harmony with nature. There are so many lessons we can learn.”

<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/massive-loss-of-biodiversity-gives-new-urgency-to-put-care-for-creation-int>

June 14, 2019

Pope Francis declares 'climate emergency' and urges action

By Fiona Harvey and Jillian Ambrose
The Guardian

Pope Francis has declared a global “climate emergency”, warning of the dangers of [global heating](#) and that a failure to act urgently to reduce greenhouse gases would be “a brutal act of injustice toward the poor and future generations”.

He also endorsed the 1.5C limit on temperature rises that some countries are now aiming for, referring to warnings from the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) of “catastrophic” effects if we crossed such a threshold. He said a “radical energy transition” would be needed to stay within that limit, and urged young people and businesses to take a leading role.

“Future generations stand to inherit a greatly spoiled world. Our children and grandchildren should not have to pay the cost of our generation’s irresponsibility,” he said, in his strongest and most direct intervention yet on the climate crisis. “Indeed, as is becoming increasingly clear, young people are calling for a change.”

The Pope's impassioned plea came as he met the leaders of some of the world's biggest multinational oil companies in the Vatican on Friday to impress upon them the urgency and scale of the challenge, and their central role in tackling the emissions crisis. It followed a [similar meeting last year](#), but this time the Pope's stance was tougher as he warned that time was running out and urged them to hear "the increasingly desperate cries of the earth and its poor".

The chief executives or chairs of BP, ExxonMobil, Shell, Total, ConocoPhillips, Chevron and several major investors including BlackRock and Hermes, responded by calling on governments to put in place carbon pricing to encourage low-carbon innovation, and called for greater financial transparency to aid investors.

However, they made no pledges to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, and set no timetable for action.

In two statements, which came at the end of a two-day meeting in the Vatican that was addressed by the pope and led by senior Vatican churchmen, the signatories called for a "combination of policies and carbon pricing mechanisms ... designed in a way that simultaneously delivers innovation and investment in low-carbon solutions while assisting those least able to pay".

The oil companies' pledges did not go far enough, said Mel Evans, climate campaigner for Greenpeace UK. "The oil majors knew all about the risk from climate change many years before most of us first heard about it. They knew where we were heading, they knew their products were the cause, and yet they kept it quiet and [lobbied for business as usual](#)," said Evans. "And they're still lobbying for business as usual. When it comes to saving the planet they will do what they are forced to do, and no more, which is why we're having to block them from drilling new oil wells as we speak. Expecting leadership from them is a path to certain disaster."

Emissions are rising at their [fastest level in close to a decade](#), BP said this week, leaving an ever shorter period to prevent dangerous levels of global heating. Every year of high emissions [takes the world closer to the brink](#), because it adds to the stock of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which can take a century to dissipate. Last month, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere showed the second highest annual increase since continuous records began more than 60 years ago.

On Friday, [BP served an injunction on the Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise](#) to try to prevent it joining the activists occupying the oil company's rig in Cromarty, Scotland. Greenpeace is trying to highlight the dangers of new oil drilling, which it says will gravely worsen the climate emergency.

In previous speeches, the pope has slammed "the continued search for new fossil fuel reserves" and said "fossil fuels should remain underground".

Bob Dudley, chief executive of BP, said after the Vatican meeting: "The world needs to take urgent action to get us on a more sustainable path and it is critical that everyone plays their part – companies and investors, governments and individuals. This requires all of us to come together, build understanding and collaborate to find solutions. Constructive dialogues such as this

meeting are essential in aligning key players on the steps needed to accelerate the energy transition while still enabling advances in human prosperity. I am grateful to his Holiness for continuing to support this critical engagement.”

BP’s chief economist warned this week that the world [“should not rely on the generosity of the private sector”](#) when it came to investing in key clean technologies such as carbon capture and storage, and called for the government to use taxpayers’ money to fund such initiatives instead.

BP’s profits doubled last year to a five-year high as its output of oil and gas soared.

Mark Campanale, founder and executive director of the Carbon Tracker, said: “We must forego business-as-usual protocols and short-term market-driven goals or face environmental and financial ruin of catastrophic proportions. Oil and gas companies have a crucial role to play in transitioning to a low-carbon economy but must today collectively take those hard decisions in the wake of determined investor and public pressure, and unambiguous scientific evidence.”

The IPCC [warned last year that the world had about a decade to bring greenhouse gases under control](#), or face a probable rise in temperatures well beyond the 1.5C above pre-industrial levels they warned would bring devastating effects such as droughts, floods, heatwaves and damage to agriculture.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/14/pope-francis-declares-climate-emergency-and-urges-action>

June 18, 2019

California's bishops call for ecological conversion on 'Laudato si' milestone

By Christopher White
Crux

A man carries a sign during the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Interfaith Peace Walk Jan. 18 in the Upper West Side neighborhood of New York City. The theme of this year's event was "Hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," from Pope Francis's encyclical "Laudato Si'." Organizers aimed to draw attention to peace and justice issues, particularly climate change, poverty and income inequality. (Credit: CNS.)

NEW YORK - Timed to mark the 4th anniversary of *Laudato si'* - Pope Francis’s landmark document on the environment - the Catholic bishops of California have released a major pastoral statement calling for statewide ecological conversion.

“God Calls Us All to Care for Our Common Home,” was released on Tuesday by the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, “to animate and energize the implementation in California of what *Laudato si'* calls us to do, and to offer a dynamic teaching and evangelization tool for our Catholic faith community and beyond, especially for young people.”

The 17-page document is divided into two sections, with the first half offering a reflection on the natural beauty of California, followed by a call to action on how all residents of the state are able to live out particular “ecological vocations” to aid the common good.

The first section, “A Canticle for California,” offers a sweeping overview of the state’s biodiversity and history.

“From the tectonic activity on the Ring of Fire, with unimaginable subterranean pressures lifting mountains, to rainfall and glaciers shaping our scenic valleys, beaches, bays, and coastline - all contribute to our understanding of what it means to live in California,” the document states.

The pastoral statement notes that California is home to more species, plants, and animals than any other state in the country, and recalls that Saint Junípero Serra - who was canonized by Francis during his 2015 visit to the United States - was among the first individuals to document plant and animal life, as well as climate variations within the state.

In recalling the state’s history, the document mentions the California gold rush in nineteenth century, observing that “many have exploited California’s riches for personal gain, creating injustices that have degraded the environment and harmed its residents, especially the Indigenous and the poor.”

The document also recalls last year’s wildfires, the deadliest in the state’s history, which ravaged nearly two million acres of land and left over 100 people dead.

“The unprecedented scope and harm of wildfires across California gives notice that something in creation is awry, out of balance, and this calls us to explore how to better care for our common home,” it states.

The pastoral statement outlines the current issues facing the state, the most populous in the country, among them being the need to “to find balance between welcoming new residents and creating the infrastructure necessary to provide housing, water, education, and jobs, while at the same time preserving our fertile farmland and protecting the integrity of our natural resources.”

Similar to *Laudato si’*, the document also makes the link between care for natural resources and care for all of creation with a condemnation of abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide.

The second half of the document, “Living our Ecological Vocations,” offers a range of specific challenges and recommendations to a number of constituencies, among them families, policymakers, business leaders, and young people.

In terms of concrete proposals, it states that “individuals and families, no matter how rich or poor, can conserve energy on a daily basis by considering the full energy budget of any purchase, such as an appliance, a vehicle, or a home.”

In addition, public officials are encouraged to enact and promote policies that improve air quality, strengthen the water systems, and transition from a fossil-based economy that does not burden the state's poor.

Artists and social innovators are encouraged to pursue new ways to elevate the natural beauty of the state, and business leaders are asked to think of ways to promote environmental responsibility in their marketing and to rethink their own policies.

Families and catechists are also urged to teach the pope's environmental encyclical *Laudato si'*, and Catholic organizations within the state are asked to consider ways to divest from fossil fuels and to pursue more energy efficient practices.

Ahead of the pastoral statement's release, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego told *Crux* that he hopes it serves as an effective tool in providing both a deeper understanding of ecological concerns and cause for action.

"The pastoral letter captures the awesome beauty of nature in California, the heartbreaking destruction both of nature and marginalized communities which is being inflicted by humanity on a daily basis, and a series of hope-driven yet realistic pathways of state level action that can lead to a restoration of God's intentions for our relationship with the created order at this moment in our history," he said.

Laudato si' was released by Francis in June 2015, and despite being considered a touchstone of his papacy, has had mixed reaction in the United States, particularly among conservative Catholics who view climate change with suspicion.

Raymond Burnell, director of education and environmental stewardship for the California Catholic Conference, told *Crux* that "*Laudato si'* awoke urgent moral imperatives and valuable policy implications that must be considered in the public square" and that the California bishops are hoping to echo Francis's encyclical in their own document.

"Each Californian, every elected official, is called upon to embrace an ecological vocation," he said. "Together we must address environmental issues with an integrated approach that combats poverty, restores dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protects nature."

Thus we hope "God Calls us to Care for our Common Home" will empower public advocacy of policies that respect life and respect the envelope of life, our Earth, upon which all life depends," he added.

Work on California's pastoral statement, which marks the most significant document to be modeled after the encyclical in the United States, began a year ago and was the brain child of Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, California, who has long championed environmental concerns.

Earlier this year, the Minnesota Catholic Conference released "Minnesota, Our Common Home," which is also modeled after *Laudato si'* and over the past 40 years prior to the encyclical's

release, Catholics in Appalachia have released several extensive treatises calling attention to the environmental degradation in their region.

In their new statement, California's Catholic bishops conclude with a call for conversion for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

"At the heart of all spirituality is conversion. We all need to change for the better. Conversion is not just turning back to God, but always embraces new thinking and new decisions - a new way of life as we move into the future. Ecological conversion challenges us to advance in culture, to grow spiritually, and to be better educated about the world entrusted by God to our care," the document states.

"The heavens and the earth belong to God, but we have been called to be good stewards. It is our hope that this pastoral statement will inspire creative, life-giving responses here in California," they conclude.

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2019/06/18/californias-bishops-call-for-ecological-conversion-on-laudato-si-milestone/>

June 18, 2019

In pastoral statement, California bishops outline *Laudato Si'* action plan

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Marking the fourth anniversary of Pope Francis' landmark social encyclical on the environment, the Catholic bishops of California issued their own sweeping pastoral statement on threats to the state's many ecosystems, inviting the church community and all Californians "to contribute to the ecological well-being of our state."

The 19-page pastoral statement, titled "[God Calls Us All to Care for Our Common Home](#)," was released Tuesday by the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, comprised of the two dozen bishops that head the state's 10 dioceses and two archdioceses. It represents one of the most wide-ranging engagements to date by the U.S. episcopacy in taking up "*Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home," Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology made public June 18, 2015.

Within the statement, the bishops reflect on "the rich, natural beauty of California" and how its history has witnessed periods when people have cared for and defended its diverse ecosystems, while at other times have exploited its land, resources and inhabitants. They go on to offer a series of action steps for the state's residents — including nearly 11 million Catholics, or 28% of the population, [according to Pew Research Center](#) — to better care for the earth, including pledging themselves to integrate *Laudato Si'* more fully into liturgies, explore expanded

renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, and even begin a discussion about the possibility for divestment from fossil fuels.

Home to Yosemite, the lush Central Valley and towering, centuries-old sequoias and redwoods, California is widely recognized as a global leader on the environment, dating back more than a century to conservationist John Muir. California maintains nine national parks, more than any other state.

Last year, its [lawmakers passed various measures](#) to address climate change and set the state on course to become carbon-neutral by 2045. Former Gov. Jerry Brown, himself Catholic and a former seminarian, attended in recent years several Vatican events on the environment, and upon the encyclical's release, [called it an essential intervention](#) "to wake people up to the dangers of climate change."

"Our state's great beauty and bounty has stirred the spirits of generations to act on behalf of environmental protection and for the justice that ensures the integrity of the land and its people," the bishops' statement reads. "For these reasons, the Bishops of California find it both fitting and necessary to reflect on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* and its message of care for God's creation."

The idea for the pastoral document emerged several years ago in the San Bernardino Diocese, where its *Laudato Si'* committee suggested to Bishop Gerald Barnes that California's bishops issue a statement similar to the [1975 pastoral letter from the bishops of Appalachia](#). In April 2018, the bishops appointed retired Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton to chair an ad hoc committee on implementing *Laudato Si'* in California and drafting a pastoral statement. Long seen as a leader on environmental concerns, the 77-year-old Blaire [entered hospice care](#) last week.

The bishops outlined two purposes for the statement: "To animate and energize the implementation in California of what *Laudato Si'* calls us to do, and to offer a dynamic teaching and evangelization tool for our Catholic faith community and beyond, especially for young people."

The California Catholic Conference, the bishops' public policy arm, has created a two-page summary to be inserted into parish bulletins. In coming months, it plans to produce faith formation and study guides for small group discussions and to encourage educators to find ways to introduce the statement into various programs. The conference also plan to roll out a series of homily guides over the next year. Individual dioceses also are exploring their own distribution efforts, including through various environmental ministries.

***Laudato Si'* in California**

In many ways, the pastoral statement reads like a miniature, localized version of *Laudato Si'*. It applies ideas raised by Francis in the encyclical to the current California context and weaves passages from the pope's apostolic letter into reflections about the West Coast state's varied geography and abundant biodiversity.

"What we wanted to do with this version is bring it down even closer to where people live, so that it was not something that people could just shrug off," said Franciscan Br. Keith Warner, a member of the committee that helped develop the document.

Warner, the director of education and action research at Santa Clara University's Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship, told NCR that the bishops recognized the "dynamic teaching opportunity" that *Laudato Si'* has presented, particularly for youth. He noted that environmental protection is already ingrained among many young people, but they're often less aware that the Catholic Church has anything to say on the subject.

The bishops' statement, guided by the concepts of the common good and integral ecology, is divided into two parts: a reflection on the Golden State's environment and threats it faces; and a series of action calls to Californians ranging from young people and politicians, farmers and Hollywood, and church ministers and the bishops themselves.

"Our Catholic doctrine offers a rich teaching on the theology of creation and our role and meaning in the world," the bishops wrote in the introduction.

The document's first section, called "A Canticle of California," enlists characters from St. Francis of Assisi's 13th century hymn "The Canticle of the Creatures" — Sister Mother Earth, Brother Fire, Sister Water, Brother Wind — to examine challenges to the state's residents and landscapes posed by land use, wildfires, water access and climate change.

The bishops make clear that "A Catholic perspective on environmentalism is expressed by concern for creatures and land, but also for where people live, work, play, and pray," adding that *Laudato Si'* builds upon the state's active environmental justice movement.

"For too long, poor communities of color have been subjected to disproportionate pollution from landfills, dirty industries, and transportation corridors adjacent to their neighborhoods," the bishops wrote.

Throughout the document, the bishops detail how "the disruption of the earth's climate" is impacting the state. They call climate change "one of the principal challenges facing humanity today." The bishops detail how recent wildfires throughout California have grown more intense and destructive, exposed more people to hazardous smoke, and how warmer temperatures and decreasing mountain snowpack has strained the state's water systems. In March, California officially declared that its seven-plus-year drought had finally ended.

"[Climate change] is a serious moral problem with profound economic and social justice implications," the bishops wrote, pointing to the disproportionate harm poor and vulnerable populations experience from a warming planet. "... Climate disruption will exacerbate social and economic inequalities, which points to the need to prioritize strategies to help all those in need adapt to our new climate reality."

From words to action

In the pastoral statement's second half, titled "Living Our Ecological Vocations," the bishops outline a series of steps Californians can take to better care for creation.

They begin by pledging to "commit ourselves to fulfilling our calling to lead the Catholic Church and its institutions in life-giving responses to *Laudato Si'*." Specifically, they promise to support clergy, pastoral leaders and ministers in integrating the encyclical into worship services, and to examine their institutional operations "to determine the full extent that we can adopt renewable energy, energy efficiency and water conservation practices."

In addition, the bishops said they would explore "opportunities for divestment from fossil fuels, whether through Diocese bank investments, oil leases, etc."

While numerous religious congregations and Catholic universities [have committed to fossil fuel divestment](#), no U.S. diocese has yet to take the step. The Los Angeles Archdiocese itself has come under fire for an [urban oil well on land they own](#) that has led to health issues for neighborhood residents; the archdiocese has said it is exploring alternate options for the land.

Declaring that "Pope Francis calls for more than the presentation of scientific information," the bishops asked parents, teachers and catechists to "create an environmental consciousness within all Catholic families" and to weave *Laudato Si'* into lesson plans. They challenged all California classrooms to enhance environmental literacy and education, in part through experiential learning outdoors and with an emphasis on ecological ethics.

The bishops invited young people to find ways to embrace integral ecology in their daily lives, take part in community environmental projects and take time to pray in nature. They also urged them to consider how future careers can balance personal needs with creation care and to engage political discussions by advocating for environmental justice.

The bishops challenged public officials to take steps to strengthen the state's water systems and continue measures to reduce carbon emissions to combat climate change and improve air quality. They lent support for programs aimed at providing financial relief on energy and water costs for seniors and low-income families, and challenged state leaders to prioritize environmental projects for disadvantaged communities, especially those facing threats to their health.

They suggested business leaders read and pray over *Laudato Si'* and examine how their companies can support sustainability and creation care. The bishops asked artists and innovators of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, among other places, "to inspire a culture of care in the human family" and to develop technology for the betterment of the planet.

"It is our hope that this pastoral statement will inspire creative, life-giving responses here in California," the bishops wrote.

Other dioceses stepping up

In the four years since Francis issued *Laudato Si'*, it has taken root at the diocesan level in varying degrees. In 2017, the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, [held a Year of Creation](#) across the Green Mountain State.

In February, the Minnesota Catholic Conference issued a *Laudato Si'* education resource of its own called "[Minnesota, Our Common Home](#)." Approved by the state's bishops, it was written "for the person in the pew" to help them consider how faith relates to the natural environment.

"The central message of *Laudato Si'* is integral ecology, which is a way of caring for both the natural and human ecologies and doing justice to both. ... This document is intended to help the faithful apply this call to integral ecology in their own local context — right here in Minnesota," said Jason Adkins, executive director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, in a press release.

Catholic institutions in California have also been active.

Several dioceses, including those in San Diego and Monterey, have made strides to install solar arrays; a third of Monterey's church-owned facilities are now powered by the sun. In 2016, the San Francisco Archdiocese [hosted a workshop](#) for parishes and schools to respond to *Laudato Si'*.

Santa Clara University's Warner told NCR that such efforts have stood as "tender shoots" that show that steps to care for creation can indeed be taken. With the bishop's pastoral statement, he sees the potential for the pope's messages on the environment to reach more people in California. And through the natural world around them, perhaps inspire in Californians even greater focus on caring for creation in their daily lives and through wider efforts.

"Ecological conversion challenges us to advance in culture, to grow spiritually, and to be better educated about the world entrusted by God to our care," the bishops wrote. "The heavens and the earth belong to God, but we have been called to be good stewards."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/pastoral-statement-california-bishops-outline-laudato-si-action-plan>
