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Pope Francis responds to questions from rectors of public and private universities from Latin America and the Caribbean at the Vatican Sept. 21, 2023. The pope told the group his new document on the environment would be titled *Laudate Deum* (Praise God). (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Stephanie Clary

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It has been another busy year for faith and climate journalism, with Pope Francis himself gracing the headlines of six of EarthBeat's 10 most-read news stories. That's largely due to the announcement and release of his new apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum*, which appears in four of EarthBeat's 10 most popular news stories and one of the five most read columns and essays.

Francis announced on Aug. 30 that he would be writing a new document on the environment, just five weeks before it was released on Oct. 4, the feast day of the pope's namesake, St. Francis of Assisi.

Other popular stories at EarthBeat this year included those about decisive and tangible climate action being taken by Catholic sisters, such as setting up conservation easements and land trusts, impact investing and political advocacy.

For this year's EarthBeat top stories list, I've separated it into one list of news stories and another list of columns and essays. Popularity was measured by pageviews on the website. But pageviews are just one measure of a story's impact, and I always take personal feedback from you — our readers — to heart.

Let me know if your favorite 2023 EarthBeat story is on the list! And if not, I would love to hear from you which articles you found to be the most interesting, surprising, challenging or hopeful. Send me an email at sclary@ncronline.org or message me on Instagram at @stephanieclaryncr.

EarthBeat's top-10 news stories of 2023

1. Pope Francis takes on climate deniers, 'irresponsible' Americans in new climate letter

By Christopher White (Oct. 4, 2023)

Pope Francis on Oct. 4 released a new document taking direct aim at climate change deniers and castigating Western nations, particularly the United States, for "irresponsible lifestyle[s]" causing irreparable harm to the planet.

2. Theologians and scientists praise, critique Pope Francis' climate exhortation

By Aleja Hertzler-McCain (Oct. 12, 2023)

Climate scientists say the science is sound in Pope Francis' new exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, and theologians applaud his "laser focus" on the climate crisis. But some also raise criticisms.

3. Pope Francis' new environmental exhortation to be released on Oct. 4

By Christopher White (Aug. 30, 2023)

Pope Francis will release a follow-up document on the environment on Oct. 4, providing an update to his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*' — a landmark letter that offered a rallying cry for global action in the fight against climate change.

4. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway reacts to inclusion in Pope Francis' climate letter

By Aleja Hertzler-McCain (Oct. 18, 2023)

Pope Francis cited Donna Haraway's use of the term "contact zone" in his apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*. They are most well known for their work that explores humanity's relationship with animals and machines.

5. Sisters of Loretto permanently preserve 650 acres of 'holy land' in Kentucky

By Brian Roewe (Jan. 26, 2023)

Under a conservation easement with the Bluegrass Land Conservancy, the land surrounding the Loretto Sisters' motherhouse — farmland, forest, native grasses, lakes and creeks — will be protected and preserved permanently.

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6. Pope Francis to travel to Dubai to address UN climate summit

By Christopher White (Nov. 1, 2023)

Pope Francis said he will attend the United Nations' COP28 climate change conference in Dubai in December, becoming the first pontiff to ever address such a high-level summit. (The pope later had to cancel this trip due to health issues.)

7. Congo is being 'martyred' for its natural resources. Will Pope Francis challenge the US, China?

By Christopher White (Jan. 31, 2023)

Catholic environmental experts and advocates hope Pope Francis' visit to the Congo draws attention to how competition for the country's minerals harms the environment and the people.

8. Aging Catholic sisters in US, Ireland continue mission through impact investing

By Sarah Mac Donald (Oct. 17, 2023)

"Vita gave Mercy a new way of mission due to our present age profile," said a Sister of Mercy who is on Vita's board. She calls the Green Impact Fund "visionary" because of its circular model and focus on communities.

9. US bishops, Catholic sister meet with White House officials about climate change

Aleja Hertzler-McCain (Nov. 17, 2023)

A group of U.S. bishops and a Catholic sister met with senior White House officials about Pope Francis' latest climate letter, *Laudate Deum*, for 45 minutes on Nov. 17.

10. Laudato Si' Movement leader to step down from global Catholic environmental network

Brian Roewe (Feb. 23, 2023)

Tomás Insua, leader and co-founder of the Laudato Si' Movement, will step down as executive director later this year. Insua announced his forthcoming departure in a letter Feb. 18, but added he will remain in the Catholic ecological movement in other roles.

EarthBeat's top-5 columns and essays of 2023

1. In US, 'Laudate Deum' won't make it into many homilies or prompt any marches

By Michael Wright (Nov. 6, 2023)

Pope Francis' new apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, is a renewed clarion call to address climate change and to promote integral ecology. But it may not have much of an impact in the U.S. Here's why.

2. Joy Harjo's poem 'Redbird Love' teaches us to watch closely, see clearly

By Ray Levy Uyeda (Feb. 4, 2023)

The world and the us are joined, always, and without effort. To look closely at others is to watch ourselves closely, and what a gift it can be, offering our attention.

3. The Doctrine of Discovery still rules today. Catholics can help turn the page.

By Brittany Koteles (April 28, 2023)

The Catholic Church is the largest private landowner in the world. Its decision-makers can model a true ethic of repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery through acts of land return, rematriation and land reparations.

4. Turkey, our national bird of gratitude, carries the seeds for a new world

By Damian Costello (Nov. 21, 2023)

The Navajo tell a story of how Turkey saved the People at the ending of one world and beginning of the next. Americans today can learn from this story. It might even change the way we understand Thanksgiving.

5. Why Catholics should divest from plastic in their closets

By Lizzy Case (Aug. 15, 2023)

As other sectors, such as transportation and energy, discuss winding down their dependence on oil, the fossil fuel industry is banking on plastics in clothing as a growing revenue stream over the next 20 years. The moral call to divest includes our closets.