



The English edition of "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment is pictured during a news conference at the Vatican on June 18, 2015. At left is Cardinal Peter Turkson. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Brian Roewe

NCR environment correspondent

[View Author Profile](#)

broewe@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at [@brianroewe](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

May 7, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Since the first Earth Day in 1970 and the birth of the modern environment movement, [nearly every pope has turned attention toward matters of ecology](#) — whether pollution, biodiversity loss, deforestation or climate change.

Pope Paul VI warned humanity's exploitation of Earth's resources "risks provoking a veritable ecological catastrophe."

Pope John Paul II stated "the ecological crisis is a moral issue" and warned of the long-term harms of burning fossil fuels.

Pope Benedict XVI, ["the green pope,"](#) taught that cultivating peace begins with protecting creation and warned against indifference. He installed solar panels at the Vatican.

Data on cardinals and climate

In the interactive data below, hover over each cardinal to learn more about him. A green dot next to an issue indicates the cardinal has expressed support for positions and teachings that generally align with those of Pope Francis. A red dot indicates disagreement with Francis' stances, and a gray dot means the cardinal's position is unclear. (See [the full NCR interactive database of the cardinal electors here.](#))

And Pope Francis [elevated ecological concerns to new heights](#), through major teaching documents (*Laudato Si'*, *Laudate Deum*, *Querida Amazonia*) and [calls for a united effort across the globe](#) to end the fossil fuel era and limit suffering and destruction from climate change.

With that prelude, the upcoming conclave to select the next pope will include a number of cardinals who have been outspoken and action-oriented in their own right on environmental issues, including climate change, both locally and on the international stage.

Below is a (non-exhaustive) review of some of the leading cardinals at the intersection of faith, ecology and climate.



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle

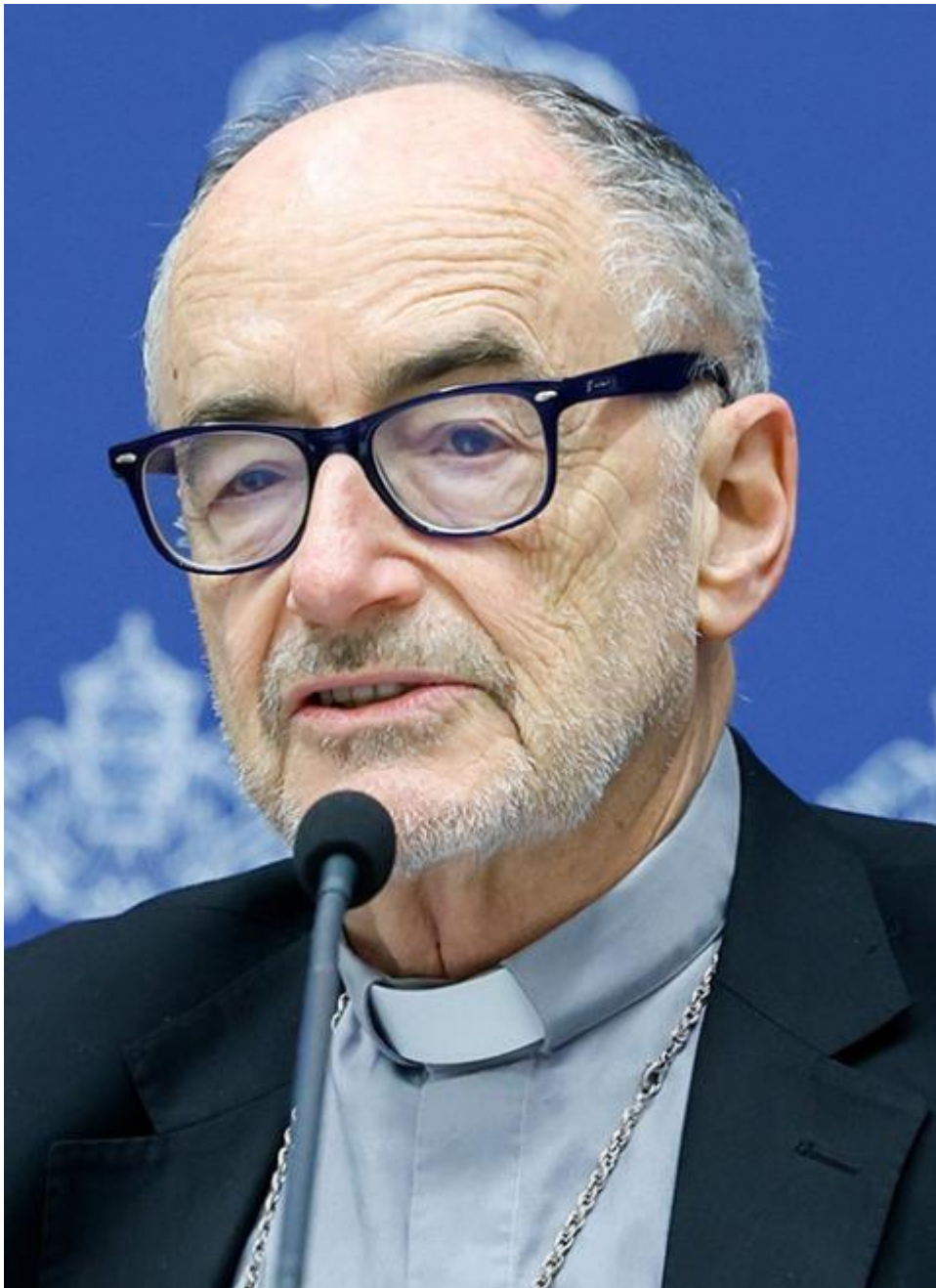
***Pro-Prefect, Vatican Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples;
appointed cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012***

Like numerous Filipino bishops, Tagle, 67, is outspoken on environmental issues, especially the [disproportionate impact of storms](#) strengthened by climate change on poor and marginalized communities. He has preached about ecological sin and [endorsed international climate action](#). While president of Caritas Internationalis, the church's official international aid organization [divested its finances](#) from the fossil fuel sector. A [key ally of Francis on integral ecology](#), he is one of four cardinals on the advisory council of the Laudato Si' Movement.

"The poor are suffering greatly from the climate crisis and fossil fuels are among the main drivers of this injustice." —[Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, on Caritas' 2018 fossil fuel divestment](#)

Related: [Philippines Cardinal Tagle talks to NCR about Pope Francis, climate change](#)

Related: [Philippine church takes lead on Francis' environmental encyclical](#)



Cardinal Michael Czerny (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cardinal Michael Czerny

Prefect, Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; elevated to cardinal by Pope Francis in 2019

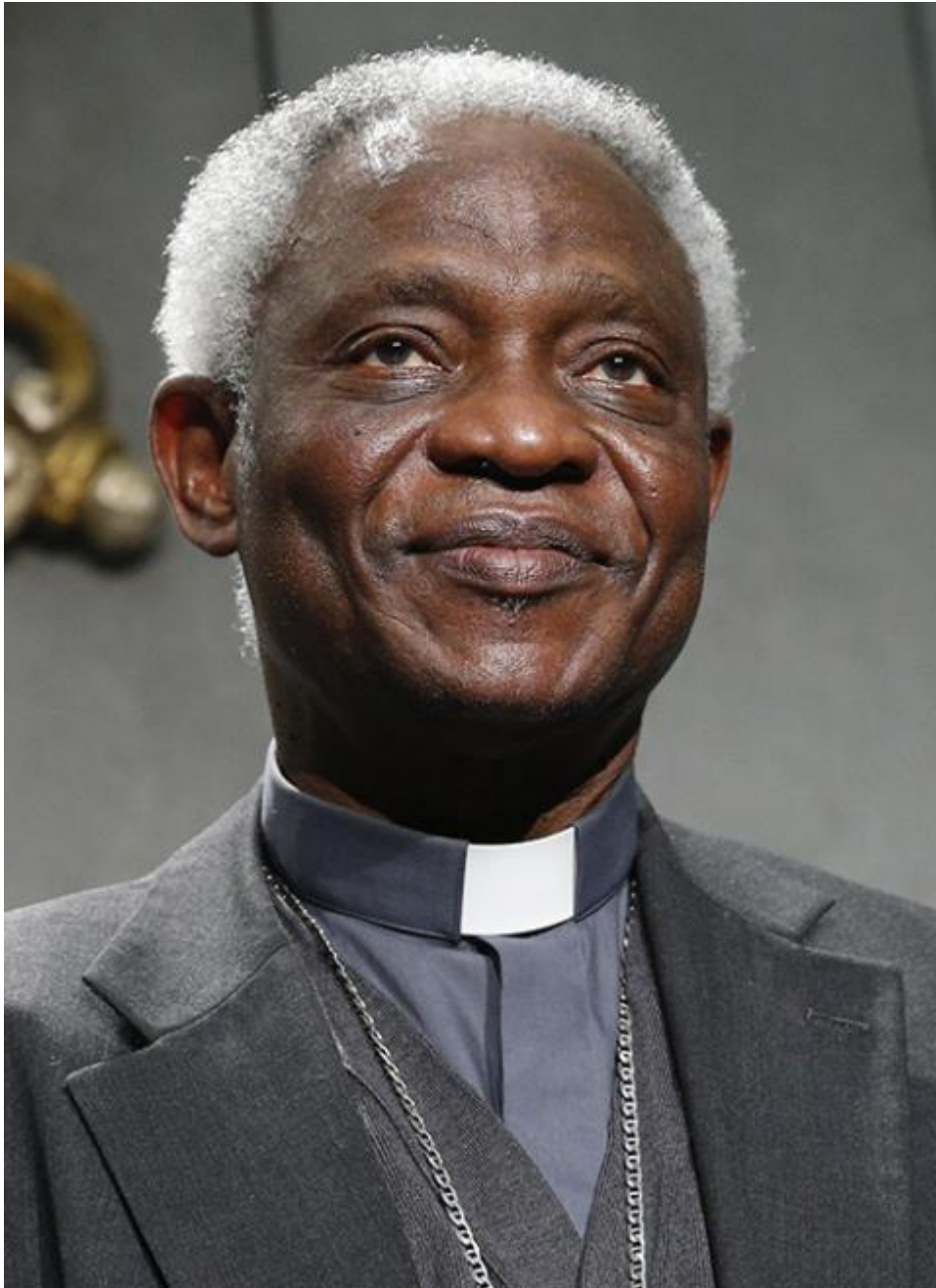
As head of the Vatican's justice, peace and creation care hub, the Canadian Jesuit has played a central role in bringing Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our Common Home" from prayer to action. Czerny, 78, has overseen the rollout of the

[Laudato Si' Action Platform](#), served as a special secretary at the 2019 synod on the Amazon and supported an international [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#). With often frank and forceful speeches, Czerny has [emphasized the connections among Francis' three encyclicals](#) — *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* and *Dilexit Nos* — and championed sustainable development while criticizing a "technocratic paradigm" that sees technology alone as capable of solving world problems.

"We are at a critical historical moment where actions today will determine the fate of generations to come. The challenge ahead is monumental; we need nothing short of a 'bold cultural revolution' to respond to it adequately." —[Cardinal Michael Czerny at the 2023 release of an environmental science booklet for Catholics](#)

[Related:](#) [Humanity could lose 'its home,' says cardinal while in Benin to boost Green Church Program](#)

[Related:](#) [At Gonzaga, Cardinal Czerny calls universities to action on climate](#)
[Vatican cardinal: Exhibit shows if world acts, environmental destruction is reversible](#)



Cardinal Peter Turkson (CNS/Paul Haring)

Cardinal Peter Turkson

Chancellor, Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences; elevated to cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2003

Turkson, 76, was among the drafters of *Laudato Si'*, and his role as head of the Vatican's peace and justice congregation (now the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) had him globetrotting to spread its message: at U.N. climate

talks, [Davos](#), [universities](#) and more. He delivered a ["10 principles of Laudato Si'" document](#) to diplomats at the COP21 climate summit that produced the Paris Agreement. The Ghanaian cardinal oversaw the development of the [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#), and in his current role at the pontifical science academies continues to hold conferences on environmental topics, including a 2024 gathering of governors and mayors [on the topic of climate resilience](#).

"This may well be the most important challenge of the 21st century. It calls for global dialogue and leadership. It is a moral issue of the highest order. No country can tackle this problem alone, nor can the poorer ones without much help." — [Cardinal Peter Turkson in 2015 speech at Boston College on Laudato Si' and forthcoming negotiations on the Paris Agreement on climate change](#)

[Related:](#) [Cardinal Peter Turkson: Bishops need to speak up on the environment](#)

[Related:](#) [On climate issue, Catholics urged to feel pain of the planet, the poor](#)

[Related:](#) [Jane Goodall with Vatican cardinal: Human survival depends on biodiversity](#)



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu
Archbishop of Kinshasa of the Democratic Republic of Congo;
elevated to cardinal by Pope Francis in 2019

A Capuchin Franciscan, Ambongo Besungu, 65, has emerged as one of the leading prelates on environmental issues in Africa. As president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, he has [denounced extraction of](#)

[the continent's natural resources](#) by multinational companies and tied [climate justice to land justice](#). A member of Francis' Council of Cardinals, he has advocated for Indigenous rights, endorsed agroecology practices and wealthy nations to support the Global South in climate solutions.

"Wherever you look on this continent, a continent already struggling due to an unjust global economic system, you see climate change holding back the potential for development." —Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu ahead of the 2022 U.N. climate summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, which the cardinal attended

Related: [Congolesse cardinal urges Global North to lead in tackling climate crisis](#)

Related: [African bishops: No climate justice without land justice](#)



Cardinal John Ribat (CNS/Bob Roller)

Cardinal John Ribat

Archbishop of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea; elevated to cardinal by Francis in 2016

Archbishop of a South Pacific island, Ribat, 68, has witnessed the impacts of climate change up close, with his archdiocese helping resettle climate refugees from the [Carteret Islands](#) fleeing rising seas. He has stressed the unequal impacts of climate

change upon poor and young people with limited resources to flee storms or rebuild. Ribat, a member of the Laudato Si' Movement advisory council, has [opposed deep seabed mining](#) in the Pacific over concerns it damages undersea ecosystems and disturbs fishing grounds.

"The difference between 1.5C and 2C of warming is the difference between prosperity and poverty, life and death, protecting 'the least of these' and ignoring their pleas for help. ... The good news is that primary solution to the climate crisis is clear: we must stop using fossil fuels, and we must do it as quickly as we can." — [Cardinal John Ribat in a 2018 op-ed for the U.K.-based Catholic Herald](#)

Related: [World's bishops appeal to COP 21 delegates for 'just and legally binding' climate deal](#)

Related: [Pope nominates presidents-delegate for upcoming Synod of Bishops](#)



Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich

Archbishop of Luxembourg; elevated to cardinal by Francis in 2019

Head of the Catholic Church in the tiny European state, Hollerich as president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union [joined a bishops' statement](#) to the 2018 U.N. climate conference urging world leaders "make rapid

and radical changes" to avert devastating climate impacts. A fellow Jesuit and member of Francis' Council of Cardinals, Hollerich has been outspoken of the role of finance in facilitating the use of fossil fuels. In November 2020, his Luxembourg Diocese and the EU bishops' commission [committed to abstain](#) from fossil fuel investments, and has [encouraged young Catholics to write to their bishops](#) about climate change and fossil fuel divestment.

"We are co-responsible for this earth, there is only one. We have to act now and I think the urgency of this call is very important." —Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich

Related: [To protect Earth, change lifestyles, say church, indigenous leaders](#)

Related: [Vatican official: Church divestment from fossil fuels is 'moral imperative'](#)



Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith (CNS/Paul Haring)

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith

Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka; elevated to cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010

Ranjith, 77, has been a vocal local environmental defender in his south Asia country, calling pollution [the worst cancer](#) afflicting the world today. In 2021, he raised alarm about the transfer of a portion of the Muthurajawela wetland to private companies,

and [sued a ship owner for alleged toxic chemical dumping](#) into the sea off Sri Lanka's coast. Ranjith has urged the Sri Lankan government [to end deforestation](#) and to [adopt renewable energy](#).

"It has been proven with evidence that [coal power plants] pose threats not only to the environment but to the lives of the people." —[Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith at a 2020 press conference calling for the closure of Sri Lanka's coal-fired power plants](#)

Advertisement

The Americans

The Catholic cardinals of the United States have been among the country's most engaged prelates in acting on Francis' calls in *Laudato Si'*.

Cardinal Robert McElroy, 71, archbishop of Washington, D.C., elevated 2022 by Francis: Outspoken on the moral questions of climate change, McElroy led the [first U.S. diocese \(San Diego\) to publicly divest from fossil fuels](#) and encouraged [solar energy in parishes](#). He has advocated the U.S. bishops create a [permanent Laudato Si' committee](#) and participated in the Amazon synod.

Cardinal Blase Cupich, 76, archbishop of Chicago, elevated 2016 by Francis: Cupich has [emphasized the need for ecological conversion](#) in areas of spirituality, education and economics and [criticized libertarianism](#) as a roadblock to U.S. reception of *Laudato Si'*. His Chicago Archdiocese created a *Laudato Si'* commission and [purchases renewable energy certificates](#) to cover the electricity demands of its 2,000-plus buildings.

Cardinal Wilton Gregory, 77, retired Washington archbishop, elevated 2020 by Francis: Seen as an early U.S. *Laudato Si'* leader, Gregory while Atlanta archbishop [commissioned a Laudato Si' action plan](#) for parishes, schools and Catholics, which has been widely adopted across U.S. dioceses.

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, 72, archbishop of Newark, elevated 2016 by Francis: Tobin has called on [countries to mitigate climate impacts](#) and also develop and share adaptation and recovery resources. As Indianapolis archbishop, he [created a creation care commission](#), and in Newark commissioned a [Laudato Si' action plan](#).

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, 75, archbishop of New York, elevated 2012 by Benedict XVI: Dolan [formed an energy management department](#) in the New York Archdiocese to assist parishes and schools in energy upgrades. He [encouraged Catholic participation](#) in the 2014 Global Climate March.

[Read this next:](#) [How Pope Francis holds powerful sway over the 2025 conclave](#)

NCR is an independent nonprofit and relies on support from readers like you, especially at this crucial moment in church history. Please donate [here to the Spring Fund Drive](#).

This story appears in the **Who will be the next pope?** feature series. [View the full series](#).