

Schwarzenegger: 'Catholic Church a powerhouse for environmental activism'

By Devin Watkins

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Over 1,000 religious leaders, climate experts, and political leaders are set to meet in Castel Gandolfo on October 1-3 for the "Raising Hope for Climate Justice" conference.

The event marks the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*, which renewed the Catholic Church's advocacy on care for creation.

Ahead of the conference at which Pope Leo XIV is scheduled to speak on Wednesday, Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Governor of California and actor of the Terminator film franchise, spoke to Vatican News about his drive to unite government and grassroots activism on behalf of the environment.

"God gave me this gift that can communicate the issue; I have the will, and I can see it, and I will do everything that I can to make this a better world," said Mr. Schwarzenegger ahead of a press conference at the Holy See Press Office on Tuesday.

The 400,000 priests in 200,000 parishes around the world have "tremendous power" to effect change if they get educated, he added.

'Real action heroes'

Mr. Schwarzenegger praised the Vatican for its commitment to become the first carbon-neutral state in the world, saying those who actually put things into practice beyond the talk "are the true action heroes."

"Government is very important in this environmental movement," he said. "But government alone cannot do it. We need everyone to participate."

Mr. Schwarzenegger urged everyone to look beyond the "naysayers," who say environmental protection laws will hurt the economy and cannot be done.

California, he said, has a booming economy despite having the strictest environmental laws, as the US state would be the world's fourth-largest economy if it were an independent country.

"I'm a big believer that anything can be done. If you have a clear vision and if you have a clear goal, then you can do it," he said. "But if you just go for hope, that's not a good strategy. So what you need is just to have a plan."

'Raising Hope for Climate Justice'

The Holy See Press Office press conference featured Mr. Schwarzenegger; Maina Talia, Tuvalu's Minister for Home Affairs, Climate Change, and Environment; Cardinal Jaime Spengler, Archbishop of Porto Alegre, in Brazil; Lorna Gold, Executive Director of the Laudato Si' Movement; and Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Over three days, the conference in Castel Gandolfo will see climate activists offer keynote addresses, alongside moments of spiritual and cultural depth.

Speaking at the press conference on Tuesday, Sr. Smerilli praised the thousands of Churches, parishes, and Catholic schools across the globe that have sought to teach people how to live a more sustainable life.

The Laudato Si' Village at Castel Gandolfo, where the "Raising Hope for Climate Justice" event takes place, offers a tangible sign of the Church's mission to intertwine faith, ecology, and culture, she said.

"The tenth anniversary of *Laudato si'* is therefore not a destination, but a new beginning," said Sr. Smerilli. "It calls us to renewed commitment, for we know that the challenges remain enormous."

Laudato Si' 10 pledge

Lorna Gold, Executive Director of the Laudato Si' Movement, told reporters that around 1,000 people are expected to take part in the high-level event at the "Raising Hope for Climate Justice" on Wednesday.

She noted that it comes a month before the COP30 climate conference in Brazil in November, lamenting that political leaders are not making enough progress toward safeguarding the climate for future generations.

“Pope Francis urged us to not give in to despair, but ‘to sing as we go’—believing that even in the most challenging times, hope can prevail and things can change,” she said.

Dr. Gold announced that the conference will launch the “Laudato Si’ 10” pledge to invite all parties to clearly set out their ambition to fulfill the vision and mandate of the 2015 papal encyclical.

“The passing of Pope Francis has energized our whole movement—we now feel a sacred duty to be a living legacy and to bring his leadership and commitment to our work,” she said. “In the coming years, we will continue to raise hope everywhere as he directed us, with a spirit of joy and determination.”