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Press Conference to present the Message of the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office, Saint Pius X Hall, Via dell'Ospedale 1, to present the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, to be held on 1 September 2023.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; the Reverend Rachel Mash, environmental coordinator for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and member of the of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (by live link); Mr. Tomás Insua, executive director of the Laudato si' Movement; Dr. Cecilia Turbitosi, animator of the *Laudato si'* Circle, *Sacro Cuore* Ladispoli, volunteer at the Missionary Centre of the diocese of Porto-Santa Rufina.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J.

“Let Justice and Peace Flow,” the Holy Father pleads, like a healing river over our damaged planet. The image of a mighty river, taken from the prophet Amos (5:24), also illustrates some key themes to help Catholics fully live the Season of Creation together with Christians of other denominations.

1. A river as an ecological image

Pope Francis brings the biblical image of the river into the 21st century, calling our attention to the real rivers that are so badly mistreated that they starkly symbolize the ecological crisis.

“The senseless war against creation,” he writes, “can be seen in so many rivers that are drying up.” Climatic changes, deforestation and erosion that result from human activity lead to mega-droughts and devastating

flooding. Ever more frequent and severe, they bring many rural communities to their knees in the face of water shortages and crop failures. The fragility of water and agriculture are now impacting many millions in urban metropolises as well.

Moreover, the Holy Father openly denounces “predatory industries” and “extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming.” Instead of being “mighty” and “healing”, so many rivers are polluted, flooding, or drying up. They testify starkly to corporate greed, corruption, galloping consumerism, and failed governance.

2. A river as a life-giving image

To counter such pillage of “Sister Water”, Pope Francis invites everyone to join “in a mighty river to irrigate the life of our marvellous planet and human family”. He encourages us to take life-giving action, transforming “our *hearts*, our *lifestyles*, and the *public policies* ruling our societies.”

To transform our *hearts*, we are invited to pray in “the great cathedral of creation” for an “ecological conversion”. The word “creation” has the two interrelated meanings: the divine *act* that created the cosmos – and still keeps on creating today – and, secondly, as a *result* of this great work: the natural beauty all around us. May the Season of Creation remind us to honour God as our active Creator and in his ongoing Creation, otherwise we remain unaware and ungrateful.

To transform our *lifestyles*, the Holy Father urges us to repent of our “ecological sins” and commit to decisive change. I am delighted to cite some good examples:

- community screenings of the film *The Letter*.
- the *Laudato si' Action Platform* facilitating coordination and implementation.
- grassroots action in networks such as Caritas and the *Laudato si' Movement*.

But scientists remind us of the urgency: many more local actions and more effective public policies are needed everywhere.

To transform *public policies*, Pope Francis calls on the COP28 summit in Dubai (30.11-12.12) to launch “a rapid and just transition to end the fossil fuel era.” He has strong words to denounce the “madness to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure.”

3. A river as a synodal image

This year, two great commitments of the contemporary Church coincide on 4 October, the feast of Saint Francis: the conclusion of the Season of Creation and the opening of the Synod on Synodality.

“Like a river system with its many tiny and larger tributaries,” says Pope Francis, “the Church is a communion of countless local Churches, religious orders and other associations.” The image suggests the synodal nature and process of the Church moving forward in history. Moreover, “in the same way that a river is a source of life for its surroundings, our synodal Church must be a source of life for our common home and all its inhabitants.”

May the *Laudato si' Week* currently underway and the Season of Creation in September be moments of both ecological conversion and synodal conversion.

Intervention of the Reverend Rachel Mash

Greetings to esteemed clergy and distinguished visitors in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are grateful indeed to His Holiness for these powerful words and support for the Season of Creation.

Let Justice and peace flow like a river. On every side we hear of the impact of climate change.

Some rivers have dried up, young women and girls must walk further and further distances to fetch water, leaving them too tired to concentrate at school, putting them at risk of sexual harassment as they walk in the dark in areas they do not know.

Other rivers have become raging torrents, carrying away homes, schools, churches and roads. Families mourn lost ones, some cannot lay their loved ones to rest as the bodies are never found.

Other rivers are clogged with plastic, industrial waste and acid from the mines.

The waters that God created to teem with living creatures are now teeming with death and disease.

So bad is the crisis that many are led into despair.

But we are a resurrection people, we believe that you must go down into the deepest tomb to find new life. We are not mourners at the deathbed of creation, we are midwives at the birth of a renewed earth.

The Season of Creation is one such sign of hope and renewal, where the family of the Church, united comes together in prayer, lament and actions of stubborn hope. An ecumenical team have prepared the celebration guide for this year's Season.

This year's theme "Let justice and peace flow like a river" shows us the way to act.

For too long the faith communities have stood by and watched the destruction of Creation and ignored the cries of our neighbours impacted by climate change. Even Creation itself we read in Rom 8:19 is standing on tiptoe waiting for the children of God to be revealed!

But now at last, we are seeing a river begin to rise, a river which can become a torrent which can move the mountain of climate change.

We know that a river begins with countless rain drops – separated, tiny and seemingly with miniscule value. These are our individual actions – to carshare, to change our diet, to save water, to recycle – some may despair saying these actions are too small, too meaningless to make a difference

Our beloved Archbishop Tutu said – its these little bits of good when put together that overwhelm the world.

It is only when the drops come together to form small trickles, maybe the green team at your church or eco-club at your school, your emerging Diocesan ecological plan, that we begin to make a difference – we join with others in the community, and a small patch of forest is saved, a bus route is restarted, a campaign for the local supermarket to ban plastic bags is successful.

Those small trickles become rivers, it is said that individual actions do not bring about transformative change, but networked actions do – we begin to form movements, *Laudato si'*, Green Anglicans, Fridays for Future, these are movements that can bring transformation. These movements can push for divestment from fossil fuels for a halt on new oil and gas explorations, for loss and damage funds to be set up. The Green Anglicans Movement of Kenya for example has just committed to planting 2 million trees per year!

But if those rivers of faithful people caring for creation and working for climate justice decide to stand apart –to flow separately – then we will not see this beautiful blue planet transformed and renewed.

Today God is calling us to work together in humility and love, to join hands so that the rivers can flow together, to become a mighty river of justice and peace, a river of worship and prayer, of lament and tears, of actions and stubborn hope - and then in the power of the mighty Spirit of God we will see the face of the Earth renewed for the sake of our children and children's children.

Intervention of Mr. Tomás Insua

It is a great honor to be part of the presentation of this papal message for "Creation Day" and the broader Season of Creation. Inspired by the momentum of *Laudato si'* Week, we can begin preparing together for the ecumenical Season of Creation, that special *kairos* when the People of God join hands to pray with and act for our common home.

This year, the Pope's message is an invitation for us all to join the "mighty river" of prayer and action for our common home. As usual, he brings up the dual themes of contemplation and action – or "Contempl-Action" as we like to say at LSM. The critical importance of tackling both the *spiritual* roots and the *material* drivers of the ecological crisis.

Regarding contemplation, Pope Francis invites us to celebrate the Season of Creation as a moment for "ecological conversion". As a moment for prayer in "the great cathedral of creation", as he writes, to honor "the great Artist" who created this stunning planet and spectacular cosmos. We are invited to celebrate our liturgies with a renewed awareness of the inseparability of Creation and Redemption, as the Holy Father points out. Throughout September, let us find ways to lift up the season's theme and its symbol of a mighty river within our communal prayer.

Regarding action, I'll just point out a key highlight: the prophetic edge of the papal statement. In line with his earlier magisterium, this message doesn't mince words about the dramatic urgency of the climate emergency and wider ecological crisis. Likewise, he doesn't shy from naming the powerful interests driving the desecration of God's Creation, calling out "predatory industries" and their "extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming."

While most other global leaders, particularly the most powerful ones, remain lukewarm and subservient to corporate interests, Pope Francis continues to be a beacon of moral leadership. Grounded in the recognition of "this injustice towards the poor and towards our children, who will bear the worst effects of climate change", he denounces the "consumerist greed" driving "the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels and destruction of forests".

A highlight is his appeal to COP28, calling for "a rapid and equitable transition to *end* the era of fossil fuels". He then adds, "it is *absurd* to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure." This mainstream view among scientists is unpopular among the largest powers, regardless of where they stand in the geopolitical divide. Still in 2023, at a time when the Paris Agreement implementation should be in full swing, powerful nations and corporations keep building more and more oil and gas wells, pipelines, coal mines and power plants – exactly what the Pope denounces.

Next September, we can join the Holy Father in lifting up the impacts of climate injustice to government leaders. The season's ecumenical committee encourages communities worldwide to host prayer services in places impacted by the climate crisis as a way to highlight the urgency of the crisis and then send the stories to their representatives at COP28.

Finally, in his message Pope Francis also shares this year's Season will also be a time of preparation for the Synod starting on October 4, the last day of the Season. We are called to journey alongside the ecumenical family, with whom we are united by one Baptism in caring for God's Creation. A relevant milestone will be the prayer vigil of September 30, "Together - Gathering of the People of God", organized by Taizé and ecumenical

partners, which we are proud to support.

May the Holy Spirit move our whole Church to speak out with and for communities and creatures most impacted by the ecological crisis, joining the mighty river of justice and peace.

Intervention of Dr. Cecilia Turbitosi

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the synodality of the *Time of Creation* enables every person who inhabits this earth to be a humble instrument of God's love.

I thank Pope Francis for inviting us to participate in this important ecumenical celebration, and for teaching us the beauty of listening to every heart, making us feel we belong to the Family of the Church.

For this shared journey, aimed at the healing of our Common Home, *Laudato si'*!

For those of us who work for the Church "on the ground", the *Time of Creation* is a marvellous opportunity to promote and live integral ecology. In particular, for us at the missionary centre of the diocese Porto-Santa Rufina, this time is an occasion for synodal collaboration with various local bodies such as the diocesan offices and the various *Laudato si'* Circles of the *Laudato si' Movement* in the area.

For us as in very many Italian dioceses, collaboration with the offices for "ecumenism and interreligious dialogue" and "social and labour issues", coordinated by the national offices of the Italian Episcopal Conference, which promote the *Time of Creation*, is very important.

The journey together has a sole mission: to care for our Common Home, in the service of and in communion with the Church, on a journey of integral ecological conversion.

Every one of us is required to live in harmony and take care of life in all its forms, so we may all be responsible custodians of the *Oikos*.

The *Time of Creation* is a concrete experience of synodality: every year we see in Italy and throughout the world the growing importance of ecclesial communities in raising awareness to listening and responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

"Everything is connected" is realized through a profound synergy between bishops, priests, religious and laypeople, enabling the birth of a model of synodality at a diocesan dimension: we are all connected.

We offer the example of *Alzati&Pedala*, an ecological bicycle ride organised and implemented by the diocese of Porto-Santa Rufina to announce the message and pastoral dynamism of *Laudato si'* in all parishes. It was a genuine mission, because this Church going out on the streets and in the territory of the diocese, opened a path of joy and sharing, created a heterogeneous inter-parish working group, which seeks unity in diversity to convey a message of Peace, Brotherhood and Synodality: all united in Christ.

We live this style as *Laudato si'* animators formed so as to be leaven and graft in our communities and lay aggregations. In this service we are united with all animators in the world in this global alliance that is the *Laudato si' Movement*.

Citiamo l'esempio dell'iniziativa *Alzati&Pedala*, ciclo-staffetta ecologica organizzata e realizzata dalla Diocesi Porto-Santa Rufina per annunciare in tutte le Parrocchie il messaggio e il dinamismo pastorale della *Laudato Si'*. Si è vissuta una vera e propria Missione, perché questa Chiesa in uscita sulle strade e sul territorio della

Diocesi, ha aperto un cammino di gioia e condivisione, ha creato un gruppo di lavoro inter-parrocchiale eterogeneo, che cerca l'unità nella diversità per trasmettere un messaggio di Pace, Fratellanza e Sinodalità: tutti uniti in Cristo.

To create true hope, peace and justice, we must continue to walk together as the People of God, through an integral ecological conversion. To respond to this need, the communities of the diocese of Porto-Santa Rufina, during this *Laudato si' Week*, are continuing the journey, increasingly numerous, with *Alzati&Cammina*, four walks that are taking place synodically in the vicariates of the diocese.

The groups, with the support of the bishop, the guidance of the diocesan directors and the participation of an ever-larger number of priests, are holding meetings to define the proposal for the next *Time of Creation*: the new edition of the ecological bicycle ride with also involve our sister diocese, Civitavecchia-Tarquinia.

As evoked by the image of the *Time of Creation 2023*, citing the prophet Amos, "We are all tributaries converging in a mighty river".

Laudato si'!
