**CARING FOR GOD’S CREATION: Living Laudato Si**

**Helping to bring Pope Francis’s encyclical to life in our community**

**From the Diocese of Syracuse “Care for Our Common Home” Task Force**

**New Movie Highlights Pope Francis’s Message About Saving Our Earth**

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*“You are social poets, because you have the ability and the courage to create hope where there appears to be only waste and exclusion.”*

– Pope Francis, Fourth World Meeting of Popular Movements, Oct. 16, 2021

The feature-length documentary *The Letter: A Message for Our Earth*, released in October 2022, tells the story of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical on human-caused climate change. Encyclicals are important letters to Catholic clergy, but the Pope intended *Laudato Si* to reach all people worldwide. So when the Laudato Si Movement formed to help Francis spread the message, they approached him about sharing his encyclical by telling the stories of people most marginalized by climate change.

Francis sent invitations to five people in the “popular movements,” what he calls those living or working on the periphery – the poor, indigenous, youth and wildlife – and asked to hear their experiences, which would become a documentary.

Epiphany, celebrated on Jan. 6, marks the Magis’ arrival at Christ’s birthplace. Perhaps the scientists and theologians Pope Francis collaborated with to write *Laudato Si* in 2015 can be thought of as modern-day Wise Men, bringing their gifts of knowledge to bear on our present climate concerns.

But more likely, it’s Luke’s story of lowly shepherds, alerted by angels of the Messiah’s birth, that most aligns with the making of *The Letter.* The film’s five “lowly shepherds” were invited to gather in Rome to represent the world’s least powerful populations:

**Poor: Arouna Kandé – Senegal.** Born in a farming region that is turning to desert, Arouna was sent at age 6 to live in a large coastal city. But climate change brought a different threat: rising seas. Nearly all homes in his region have flooded. Many men needing jobs try to emigrate to Europe by boat, and many of them die at sea. “Climate change is making our country poor,” Arouna says.

* *Experts predict that climate change will displace up to 1.2 billion people by 2050.*

**Indigenous: Chief Cacique “Dadá” Borari – Brazil Amazon.** The Amazon forest, a rich source of food and shelter to uncounted species, is threatened by logging and agribusiness. “A part of Brazilian society wants to turn the Amazon into a large financial market,” says Dadá. After forcing the government to act by photographing illegal logging, he was kidnapped, tied to a tree and beaten unconscious.

* *Indigenous peoples are stewards of 80% of the world’s remaining biodiversity.*

**Youth: Ridhima Pandey – Haridwar, India.** At age 9, this climate activist helped sue the Indian government for failing to meet its Paris Climate Agreement obligations. By age 11, when she was invited to Rome, she had already attended U.N. meetings advocating for children’s rights. In the film, she expresses deep concern for an Australian friend whose family home is about to be consumed by fire.

* *The Australian superfires of 2019-20 destroyed land the size of the United Kingdom and killed or harmed 3 billion animals.*

**Wildlife: Drs. Greg Asner and Robin Martin – Hawaii.** These scientists study Hawaii’s coral reefs, mapping the ocean’s biodiversity depletion caused by mysterious marine heatwaves. “Coral reefs are like the rainforest of the sea,” home to innumerable species of fauna and flora that interact with each other to survive, Robin explains.

* *99% of the world’s coral reefs may die if temperatures rise by 2 degrees centigrade.*

In Rome, Francis tells his five visitors the Tower of Babel story: King Nimrod wanted a mighty tower high as the heavens. If a brick dropped to the ground, the worker was punished severely. But if a worker plummeted to earth, “no big deal, he was replaced immediately.”

“This is key to interpreting what’s happening today,” says Francis. “We’ve built a tower of human arrogance, with bricks of power, bricks of economy. … So many people work like slaves, and if a slave falls, nothing happens. But we’ve taken it an extra step. If *nature* falls, nothing happens. It’s the arrogance of the power of a few people that … use people, use nature, use everything and destroy it.”

The cry of freedom now has to come from the new generation: the youth and the popular movements, backed by science, explains Francis. “The people have wisdom.”

[*The Letter*](https://www.theletterfilm.org/), directed by Nicholas Brown, is available [free on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rps9bs85BII).com. All Saints Church in Syracuse plans a viewing and discussion open to the public in March.