# Pope Francis dies leaving a profound legacy on climate action and Indigenous rights



The Vatican has officially announced the death of Pope Francis, marking the passing of a significant religious leader whose influence extended far beyond the confines of the Catholic Church. The late pontiff, originally from Argentina, was the first Jesuit pope and was renowned for his commitment to social justice, environmental protection, and advocating for vulnerable communities worldwide.

Pope Francis first came to notable international attention for his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, a letter addressed to bishops that outlined the Church’s policy on climate change and called for a comprehensive cultural shift towards greater ecological responsibility. This document not only urged Catholics but all people to recognise the fragility of both the planet and humanity, advocating for an “integral ecology” approach that marries social equality with environmental stewardship.

His engagement with climate issues was evident at pivotal moments on the global stage, particularly during major United Nations climate summits. *Laudato Si’* was strategically published in 2015 ahead of the Paris COP21 summit, setting a religious and moral framework that coincided with global efforts to curb climate change. A subsequent statement, *Laudate Deum*, was released in October 2023 just prior to COP28 in Dubai. In this exhortation, Pope Francis offered both encouragement and criticism — commending the symbolic unity of the Paris agreement while lamenting the widespread failure of nations to meet their commitments, as well as the political inertia that followed.

The influence of Pope Francis also helped bring greater attention to Indigenous peoples' perspectives within these climate discussions. COP28 saw unprecedented inclusion of Indigenous voices on the global stage, a shift partly attributed to the pope’s ongoing emphasis on listening to and defending Indigenous communities. His 2020 exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* (“beloved Amazonia”), emerged from his direct engagement with Amazonian communities and helped shape Catholic social teaching, notably influencing his later encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (“all brothers and sisters”). These texts highlighted the intersection between environmental destruction and the human rights threats faced by Indigenous peoples, many of whom are defenders of their ancestral lands amid encroachment by extractive industries.

Tragically, the risks faced by such environmental defenders are severe. For example, Father Marcelo Pérez, an Indigenous priest in Mexico, was murdered by drug dealers in late October 2023 after mass, underscoring the peril linked to defending land and community rights. Global reports estimate that 196 environmental defenders were killed in 2023 alone. Pope Francis repeatedly advocated for these marginalised groups, amplifying their plight on the international stage.

Beyond his diplomatic and theological influence, Pope Francis inspired grassroots activism worldwide. Research conducted at the University of Manchester, involving over 300 religious climate activists from various Christian denominations in the UK, found that 61% cited the late pope as their primary motivation for engaging in climate action. The *Laudato Si’* movement that emerged from his encyclical now encompasses 900 Catholic organisations and over 10,000 “animators” — leaders and ambassadors in their own communities dedicated to climate activism.

The death of Pope Francis leaves the Catholic Church at a crossroads, with the identity and priorities of his successor yet unknown. The late pontiff’s legacy remains deeply tied to bridging faith, social justice, and environmental responsibility, and his influence has been significant in shaping global conversations on climate change and Indigenous rights. As the Church and the world face ongoing political and environmental challenges, the extent to which the next pontiff continues to build upon this legacy will be closely watched.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-04/pope-francis-dies-on-easter-monday-aged-88.html> - This URL confirms the Vatican's official announcement of Pope Francis's death, marking the end of his influential tenure as a significant religious leader.
2. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html> - This link provides access to Pope Francis's groundbreaking 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*, which heavily emphasized environmental responsibility and social justice.
3. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200531_querida-amazonia.html> - This URL offers the text of *Querida Amazonia*, an exhortation by Pope Francis that highlighted the importance of listening to Indigenous communities and protecting their land.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jun/18/laudato-si-movement-climate-action-activism-religious-groups> - This article discusses the *Laudato Si’* movement and its role in inspiring grassroots climate activism across different religious groups.
5. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop28/what-is-cop28> - This link provides information about COP28 in Dubai, where Pope Francis's statements encouraged greater global action on climate change.
6. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/23/fatal-environmental-defenders> - This report highlights the risks faced by environmental defenders, a group Pope Francis advocated for, especially in the context of Indigenous rights.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMilwFBVV95cUxPRFMzT1BQVXU2cFVjazVCVFU1QVdnZTVJYklXTVhyLUV0dHdMazFvZThjb2JDN1h3ZjVXZkJhSkk1VTMwazEtTVlHdXQ3TTdNeklmbmZQT0I2M09hY2ZScnZPYW9LTmpadXYwU01aS1Q0Tk00MHdEQXdNODd2Q2ptbXdxaDZCWkpQTkFnN1ZaVGp0d1ltUElR?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data