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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local and national faith leaders praise Pope Francis' historic encyclical on environment and human ecology

Leaders of diverse religious groups agree: Addressing climate change is a moral imperative

Prominent faith leaders representing the world's major religions today have expressed enthusiastic support for Pope Francis' "Laudato Sii (Be Praised): On the Care of Our Common Home," an encyclical on stewardship of the environment and human ecology. The Pope's pastoral letter, the boldest environmental signal to date from the Roman Catholic Church, calls on all people of conscience to take up climate change as a moral imperative.

The leaders of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO)'s Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL) praised Pope Francis for his leadership. As one of 40 IPL national affiliates advocating for climate as a moral issue, OIPL awaited the issuance of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical with great anticipation. OIPL urges all people of faith and good will to read the letter and reflect on it, including those who think they may disagree with its central message.

Oregon Interfaith Power & Light is planning study groups on the letter in the coming months to deepen ecumenical and interfaith dialogue on environmental matters. "There are many starting points for congregations of all faiths that want to engage in climate action for the first time or deepen their work," said Jenny Holmes, director of EMO's Environmental Ministries. "From doing energy efficiency upgrades, to study groups and climate advocacy, there are a wealth of resources available for congregations for the Interfaith Power & Light network."

The Rev. Canon Sally G. Bingham, president and founder of Interfaith Power & Light (IPL), said, "Reverence for the Earth is a tenet of all faiths. Religious people are called to be responsible stewards for God's creation. IPL has been working on this major moral challenge for 15 years, and Pope Francis's guidance could be the game-changer that encourages everyone to step up and care for those suffering in the wake of human induced climate change."

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ■ Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren ■ Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

Some prominent global warming deniers are challenging the Pope's motivations and dismissing his authority on the issue. But many religious leaders say it is wrong to dismiss Pope Francis' message on political grounds.

"Leaders of all faiths have witnessed the devastating effects climate change has on our less fortunate brothers and sisters," said the Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Durley, former president of the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta. "I've heard politicians say the Pope should hold his tongue, but what we have on our hands transcends science and politics. Climate change harms the most impoverished and marginalized members of society—it's both a human rights issue and a civil rights issue. And if we take Pope Francis' message to heart, we can, must and will make a difference."

Pope Francis' encyclical is the first in history to specifically address humanity's relationship with the environment. In his letter to all the bishops of the Catholic Church, the pontiff cites the effects a warming planet has on the world's most vulnerable populations.

"Caring for each other, 'every living thing' as the Bible says, should take priority over debating the science of climate change or who has the right to an opinion," said Rev. Richard Cizik, former vice president for governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals. "People of faith should not let politics harden their hearts to a message from a leader of their faith, and no religious leader should be criticized for speaking out on an issue of moral concern—it's our responsibility."

The encyclical explores the relationship between creation care, sustainability of the environment and concern for the poor—all foundational themes for the great religions of the world.

"Every sacred tradition insists that we defend 'the least among us,' and it's a central shared feature in Jewish and Catholic thought," said Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb, committee chair for the Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life. "May government and industry leaders note the religious unity around this issue. If the world's religions can agree, surely the nations of the world can do the same, and then the real work on climate change can begin."

"When we think with our hearts and not our politics, the truth is plain to see," said Imam Dr. Mohamed Abdul-Azeez, founder of Tarbiya Institute. "Our respective faiths guide us toward giving our time, energy and succor to those in need. We are united in our concern and willingness to take action. I encourage everyone, regardless of their religion, to personally consider Pope Francis' message."

Added the Rev. Canon Bingham, "The impact of today's message is clear: if you are person of faith, you have a responsibility to address climate change. It's as simple as that."

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns connects, inspires, informs and empowers people, congregations and religious institutions to work for justice and the care and renewal of the earth.

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Media Release

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EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.

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