

# Revisiting Pope Francis: Climate Changer?

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**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One, I'm Greg Dalton.

**Ariana Brocious:** I'm Ariana Brocious

**Greg Dalton:** On Monday, Pope Francis died at the age of 88.

**Ariana Brocious:** The Catholic church's first Latin American pope was known for his humility and efforts to make his religion more inclusive and welcoming around social issues like same-sex marriage.

**Greg Dalton:** He was also a climate leader. In honor of his passing, we are rebroadcasting a Climate One episode from 2015 that focused on the Pope's views on climate and humanity.

**Ariana Brocious:** In 2015 Pope Francis wrote a landmark encyclical on climate change and inequality called, "Ladato Si". Ladato Si means "praise be to you" and the subtitle was "on care for our common home"

**Greg Dalton:** I remember it causing quite a stir at the time. The Pope's message took aim at our culture of consumerism and the devaluing of nature. He called for the world to move away from coal and oil without delay. Pope Francis also took a swing at unfettered capitalism and technology - calling them out as root causes of an ecological and moral crisis.

**Ariana Brocious:** Ten years ago, when he published this paper, politicians were swift to push back. Rick Santorum said the church should leave science to the scientists. Jeb Bush said "I don't get economic advice from my bishops or my cardinal or my Pope."

In the same year, Pope Francis visited the U.S., where he had a private audience with President Obama and was the first Pope to address a joint session of Congress.

**Greg Dalton:** Ahead of that visit I had a live conversation at the Commonwealth Club with three guests:

- Reverend Canon Sally Bingham, an Episcopal priest and founder of Interfaith Power and Light, a religious response to climate disruption.
- Sam Liccardo, who was the Mayor of San Jose, California at the time of this taping. He currently represents part of Silicon Valley in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- And Father Paul Fitzgerald, a Jesuit educator, who was president of the University of San Francisco during this taping. He stepped down from that role last December.

[Applause]

Welcome to all of you. Paul Fitzgerald, tell the story of Pope Francis. Who he is, where he came from, there's been a lot written about this Pope but people may not really know that he was different before than he is now.

**Paul Fitzgerald:** Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born of Italian immigrant parents in Argentina. Grew up, became a Jesuit at a very young age and then at a very young age was promoted to be provincial superior of the Jesuits in the Argentinian province. And as he reflects back later, he was too young and too inexperienced and so he ruled with a pretty firm if not an iron hand. He was novice master, he was provincial, he was director of formation so it rotated around various positions of authority and responsibility. It was during the time of the generals and the dirty war in Argentina, people were being disappeared by the police, people being killed and so it was a very difficult time for the Jesuits and for the church as a whole. He later became archbishop of Buenos Aires and if you read his stuff, he's conservative, very orthodox, very much in line with the thinking of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict. And when he was elected Pope, maybe like some Republican presidents who appoint a Supreme Court Justice and then are bit surprised by how this person begins to rule once she is on the bench.

[Laughter]

We have seen in these last few years a magnificent soul. We call it the grace of office, he is kind, he is generous, he is welcoming, he has washed the feet of Muslim women. He's doing all kinds of what I would call symbolic, prophetic actions to ask the church and the world to think again about us being one human family.

**Greg Dalton:** Sally Bingham, what has been the impact of Pope Francis outside the Catholic Church, other faith traditions?

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** Well, I've been working for 15 years on a religious response to global warming and we've been to all of our preachers and teachers have been talking about the moral responsibility that individuals have towards the future, we've talked about individual action, we've talked about trying to influence politics, but particularly the moral responsibility that we have for the generations that come after us. So to have Pope Francis get in his pulpit and say the same thing. You know, it's been an amazing boost to the entire religious community because our group which is interfaith, we are -- we have Jews and Muslims and Christians of all kinds and we have Jains and Hindus and Sheiks and they're all been working for all these years to try to implement change in terms of how the US responds to the climate problem. And with the Pope coming out, giving a statement that was essentially for all people of conscience, not just for Roman Catholics. We are exalted. I mean everyone is just jumping on this message to say "See, we told you so."

**Greg Dalton:** If the Pope says it must be true. And Sally Bingham, also there's some lapsed

Catholics, tell us about a couple that wanted you to marry them.

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** This was very funny, it happened recently. About three weeks ago, I got a call from a young man who wanted to be married at the Fairmont Hotel and couldn't find a priest to go to the Fairmont and marry them and would I do that, I said yes, I marry people on the beach and I marry people in the Muir Woods and then he talked to me for a little while and then he said, you know, I think my wife might have some difficulty with this too, but I'll let you know.

And three weeks went by and I never heard from him again. And then I got an email and it said, we've decided to be married by a Catholic priest, thank you very much for your help and it was pretty much over. In two days, I got a telephone call from the bride to be, the fiancée called and she said "You know, we love Pope Francis and we might even get back into the Catholic Church." So but while they're doing this, they're trying to find a Catholic priest who will go to the Fairmont and marry them but they couldn't find one so they have rehired me.

[Laughter]

So I'm now going to the Fairmont to marry this couple but they also think that they may start going back to church largely because of Pope Francis.

**Greg Dalton:** So you got a hired, fired and rehired okay --

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** That's right.

**Greg Dalton:** -- that's right, yeah, good. Sam Liccardo, you went to this big meeting of mayors in the Vatican and the Pope did this very deliberately, calling out mayors as an important area for action on climate change. So what did you learn there what happened, it must be pretty exciting to be there?

**Sam Liccardo:** It was exciting, it was a real privilege for me and I'm a big fan of this Pope. So it was certainly, doubly great opportunity. I was one of about 65 mayors or so from around the world to join this meeting. It was a great opportunity certainly for me to learn from other mayors of large cities that are out there innovating doing very creative things to try to move the needle in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the environment. So from that standpoint, just professionally it was certainly a lot of fun and exciting.

But certainly the opportunity to hear from Pope Francis. A group of us had an audience for about 30 minutes and spoke in Spanish and then I understood maybe two thirds of it but it was good enough for me.

**Greg Dalton:** They're pretty cool. One of the key tenants of his encyclical is integral ecology so Paul Fitzgerald, tell us about that and how new that is, what it means. Integral ecology is one of the key philosophical touchstones of Pope Francis' encyclical.

**Paul Fitzgerald:** Since the 1890s, the Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church has had a series of encyclical letters come out from various popes starting with Leo XIII. And all of them and this Laudato Si by Pope Francis is the most recent in a long string of letters that each one builds on the last one. And they're based on a profound and fundamental insight that our religious convictions should inform every aspect of our life including our relationships with those whom we love, our participation in our city, in our church, in our world, and that everything is connected. This comes back again and again and again throughout the encyclical Laudato Si; everything is connected. And there's so much of modern life and Western culture that is fissiparous and it's fissiparous, everything is broken into small pieces and we think of our lives in this very small, discreet compartments, you

know, with this group of people I behave this way, with this group of people, I behave that way. When I'm at work, I dress this way, when I'm at home I dress a different way. And the danger is we become really schizophrenic, we're divided into so many different personas. And what the Pope is calling us to is simply to be profoundly persons of integrity and to close the largest gap ever measured by human beings, the 14 inches between the heart and the brain. So that what we know in our hearts, deep down, we know we can never lie to ourselves, in our hearts. With our brains alone, we can make up all kinds of excuses and rationales for any kind of bad behavior.

But what we know in our hearts and then what we understand with our minds, what we say with our words and what we do with our hands should all be the same thing. And so the way we inhabit this planet with all the human persons -- and he keeps calling us back to care for the poor but also then care for the other living beings and care for the ecosystems -- that's integral ecology but it's just an integrated human existence.

**Greg Dalton:** Sally Bingham, one of the phrases in the encyclical says "Many things have to change course but it is we, human beings above all who need to change." He's asking us to do some hard work, every individual.

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** Every individual and I think that he has invited us into the communion of life, that we are all part of a one big universe. And every one of our behaviors affects our neighbors who we're called to love, whether it's the coffee we drink or the clothes we wear or the energy we use. Every single thing we do affects another person and the planet.

**Greg Dalton:** Let me ask Sam Liccardo, how do you actually implement this in a city where you're running a big city, you know, what is this mean so I mean most politicians don't ask their voters to change. They say that you're going to deliver some right to do this but --

**Sam Liccardo:** Yes. Most voters would regard me as being the person on the stage with the least moral authority.

[Laughter]

Yeah, but building on Sally's point, you know, the Pope is not suggesting that this is a technological problem that needs a technological fix. He's talking about an adaptive problem that requires a complete shift in cultural paradigm and a revolution of sorts in how we think and act in our daily lives.

So that's not an easy sell in politics. And, you know, he's not looking for us to come out with the solution of spending more money on say, carbon sequestration and just solving this issue. I think the question is how can we as community leaders engage our community and actually doing the much harder work of understanding the extraordinary lifestyle shift that's required here.

**Greg Dalton:** Big lifestyle shift, in fact when Paul Fitzgerald says connectedness, use connectedness in Silicon Valley and I mean something totally different. I mean where's my Wi-Fi and why don't I have it, right and --

**Sam Liccardo:** Perhaps the opposite, right.

**Greg Dalton:** And Pope Francis comes out pretty strong challenging sort of the cult of technology. And Mayor Liccardo, you run the city that's the heart of Silicon Valley; he's taken a swing at Exxon and Apple.

**Sam Liccardo:** Yes. Yes. Perhaps in extreme view you might say I'm the mayor of Sodom in that

sense. But the reality is we recognize that there's not simply a technological path out here. At the same time, I'm a mayor, I happened to have a bit of a bias in favor of technology. I think there's a lot we can do and certainly for example, if we're going to retrofit a city that's been built around the automobile to one that city that's built around people, technology is going to help. And there are things we can do certainly to help with that transition, but that doesn't take anything away from the fundamental truth that I think Pope Francis has hit here which is this is a moral issue. It's really, this is a symptom on something far greater and we all need to take a closer look at ourselves.

**Greg Dalton:** Paul Fitzgerald, you run a university that's full of technology addicted students probably, how do they square this challenge of technology with their daily life and culture?

**Paul Fitzgerald:** So the University of San Francisco, we have about 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

1,200 full and part time faculty and another 1,200 full and part time staff folks, so we're a small town compare to San Jose, California, we're a very small town. But we've made the pledge as a university campus to be carbon neutral by the year 2050 and we are well on our way, we're well below our, we're bigger than we've ever been and, you know, below our 1997 carbon footprint. So part of it is we just opened an office of campus sustainability and we have a person in the middle who's talking to facilities and to our faculty and to student life. So that we offer a holistic education by example as well as, you know, we have wonderful faculty in the classroom teaching on climate policy, teaching on, you know, what are the technological fixes. You know, Pope Francis is not Luddite, he's not asking us to go back to the back to the pre-industrial revolution. At the same time he warns us very clearly that, you know, if in our great, great generosity and love, we wanted to bring the rest of the human population up to our level of consumption, we would kill the planet in a week. One North American is as much weight on the planet as 250 Somalis. So, you know, ours -- here in North America, ours is not the normal typical common experience of human beings on the planet. The normal typical experience of humans on the planet is in a much, much poorer, much more modest, much more environmentally fragile system.

**Greg Dalton:** So how to address poverty without trashing the planet, Sally Bingham?

[Laughter]

In 30 seconds or less, yeah.

But I think the issue of poverty is such an important one and for the faith community because the people that are hurt the most by this big subject that we're all talking about which is climate change are the poor people. They suffer the worst first and we as almost responsible for the destruction and the sea rise and the droughts and the wildfires and the refugees that are having to move because of lack of resources in their homes. We are the folks that and I think this is what the Pope is calling on, that maybe disturbs some folks is that we have a moral responsibility to look after those folks. Put up money for adaptation, put up money for mitigation and help them develop -- I mean we can't, there are 300 million people in India who have no access to electricity. Now, we can't say, well that's too bad, you can't have the electricity the way we've had it in the United States and Western Europe. But what we can do is subsidize some renewable energy for the places in the world that maybe don't have to go through first coal and then oil and then fracking; that we could help out with renewable energy to start with, just the way many people in India have cellphones now but they've never had a landline.

Now perhaps we can go with wind and sun and help them do it though, they're not going to be able to do it on their own. So I think that we can certainly help the poverty situation by trying to supply

the means to help these folks have electricity, have food, have water through the generosity of the developed world.

**Greg Dalton:** Mayor Liccardo, there's also poverty in America, poverty in Silicon Valley, there's a great wealth gap in this country, it's probably the biggest issue in this country along with climate. So what are you doing in San Jose to address that underclass?

**Sam Liccardo:** Well, we're trying to do a lot and the reality is the larger force is beyond the power of city hall and that really constrains what we're able to accomplish. Last week announced that we're trying to engage regionally with fifteen cities and towns throughout the county to raise the minimum wage together so we don't just have a patchwork of different rules. We've -- just last year and the prior years we've passed various fees on housing development so that we can generate funds to build more affordable housing. You know, there's a host of these kinds of policies that we put out and we think we're going to be able to help a few hundred folks, maybe a few thousand folks at the margin. The reality is that the gap between those who are prospering in this great boom and those who are being left behind is growing. And, you know, it may well be that more than half of us are the ones falling behind. And so this gives us a certain moral imperative to think more deeply about what exactly we can do from a policy standpoint to try to bridge that gap.

**Greg Dalton:** Paul Fitzgerald, Pope Francis in his encyclical really goes after market capitalism which is driving a lot of what Sam Liccardo just talked about. But first tell us about Francis himself, he was quite a radical himself, you know, communed with flowers, perhaps the first flower child or hippie.

**Paul Fitzgerald:** Was it Bernard loved the mountains and Dominic the valleys, Francis the small towns and Ignatius the big cities.

So at Jesuit University we like big cities. Francis of Assisi would go into little country churches and pick up a broom and sweep them out and clean them up. He would talk, he would preach to the flowers and to the birds and to the wolf of Gubbio. He had this profound sense that the Divine was within and underneath and present in every living being and in every beautiful vista. And so brother sun, sister moon, he had a spirituality which was deeply Christian and what we would call in fancy theological language panentheistic. So pantheism is that everything is God, panentheism is that God is in everything. There is no human person where the spark of the Divine is not within her soul. There is no living creature, there is no beautiful vista where this spirit of the Divine is not available to us to be encountered.

What Pope Francis is doing is most of all and Reverent Sally Bingham said this earlier, Pope Francis is suggesting a spirituality. And that's where the letter really comes together in the closing chapters is he's suggesting a spirituality, a way of us understanding our relationship with God, with our self and with all of creation that is loving and that is joyful and that is fulfilling. So many people these days even with great wealth, you know, we become distracted by our devices, we walked into poles, we go to the emergency room because we hurt our self.

[Laughter]

Kids at my university they're in the dorm room, they're back to back and they're texting each other rather than just turning and talking. And, you know, this technology can divide us and it can flatten out our lives. Adolfo Nicholas is the general superior of the Jesuits based in Rome. And he's talked about the globalization of superficiality.

The globalization of superficiality that comes with a poor appropriation of these, of the wonderful

possibilities that are contained in high technology. Technology can do a lot of good things for us. But it can also do some bad things to us if we're not mindful about what's most important.

**Greg Dalton:** Sally Bingham, Muslim leadership recently came out with the first unified call on climate change. What did they say and what's the significance of that?

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** Well, the significance is that most of the religions, whether they are evangelical, Christian, Roman Catholic, the Catholic Bishops, Rabbis who the Jewish community has come out all saying we need climate control and to cut carbon emissions. The Muslims have never done this; they've never had a statement where several Imams were in agreement and where it was an official Muslim statement. So it means a lot to the community, the entire interfaith community to have the Muslims on board with the rest of us and it is quite significant.

**Greg Dalton:** Paul Fitzgerald, some people think that this moral frame is very important for social movements. Pope Francis has put climate change in a moral frame. How does that compare to other social movements and what's the significance of that?

**Paul Fitzgerald:** If we think about the civil rights movement, if we think about all those movements that have animated this country, giving women the right to vote, it's been about asking the people who are in a position of power and authority especially if they are a minority and hold lots and lots of power to voluntarily give that power up, share it more broadly. And that willingness to cede control and to enlarge the circle greatly takes courage but it also takes, I think, some sort of transcendent inspiration. There has to be this recognition that these folks who have been previously excluded because of their gender, their skin color or nowadays because they live in the third world and they're not at the table in the first world where the big decisions are made, that we recognize their humanity.

And there's a certain shame in ourselves that we had denied their humanity so long. And that's why it's difficult, right, because, you know, when we enlarge the circle broadly and bring in people who had previously been excluded it means that we had been excluding and exclusive and unjust. And so, I think, there is a sense of conversion, a sense of repentance and then a sense of liberation and even joy that comes through that cycle. But I think the great social movements have involved, you know, both people on the outside asking to be in but also people on the inside opening the door and saying, yes, it's not you and us, it's us, all of us.

**Sam Liccardo:** But, you know, putting into action I think, you know, that the typical response of elected officials is to say, okay let's go pass an ordinance or measure that's going to change something. But the spirit of the encyclical and I think going to Paul's point is really that this is something that the entire community has to engage in. And engaging in community is much harder work and it requires an awful of opening up, certainly of education, and also admitting that you don't have all the answers and that's a hard thing for elected leaders to do.

So we are, right now, over the last several weeks we've been spending some time talking internally about how can we meaningfully engage the community in San Jose, both in terms of behavioral change but also about informing us about what might be a good path to follow as a community. Do we as a community choose, for example, community choice aggregation for deciding where our energy should come from or perhaps we should choose a path that is more determined by individual choices? Those are the kinds of things that it takes a lot more work and it's usually not a recipe for electoral success but I think it's certainly something we all need to do.

**Greg Dalton:** Sally Bingham, speaking of electoral politics, how do you think Pope Francis changes the politics of climate in the United States? 30% of Congress is Catholic.

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** I think there are 137 Roman Catholics in the Republican Congress. So I'm very hopeful that if they really are faithful Catholics and if they believe in the infallibility of the Pope, which I guess some still do, they will take this to heart. And when you opened and talked about Rick Santorum saying that he doesn't listen to his Pope for his economics or his --

**Greg Dalton:** Jeb Bush doesn't listen to the Pope for economic -- yeah.

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** Then perhaps it's time they did do that. But I do think that there will still remain the deniers who will dismiss the Pope because they don't want to go down the path of cutting our fossil fuel use. But I may be naively optimistic but I think it's going to make a difference. I think he's already made such an enormous difference in saying in the encyclical that we needed to cut back on fossil fuels. And the entire Green group, the big secular environmental organizations, are using Pope Francis now to make the changes or help make the changes that they've been preaching and teaching about for the last 25 years.)

And I think that he is breaking a lot of boundaries and I think that his message is going to seep through to enough people that we will see change.

**Greg Dalton:** Is there a risk of breaking too many boundaries? We have this church and state thing in this country that, you start to blend faith and politics that makes some people nervous. Sam Liccardo.

**Sam Liccardo:** I don't think we have to blur these boundaries. I mean, the good news is, is that the overall preponderance of scientific expertise out there just happens to agree with the church in this case. This is not the situation, say, with Galileo. We're in a position now where we've got a Pope who's saying, look, we get the science, now we it's a moral issue for us. So I think the good news is we don't have to somehow or another blur those lines. I think we can appropriately say the scientific issue has been largely resolved. Now, it's really a question how we will respond as a community.

**Greg Dalton:** Paul Fitzgerald, the way some states are responding is to divest from fossil fuels. The state of California is in a process of selling its coal assets, divestment is a big issue on college campuses around the country mainly focused on coals, can move to oil. How about the University of San Francisco, is divestment an issue there and what is the school doing?

**Paul Fitzgerald:** Yeah, we have a \$300-million, well depending on the stock market, a \$300-million endowment.

[Laughter]

But, you know, we have some investment in power, in energy companies but those are with great portfolios and then, you know, we can do kind of activist shareholders and stuff to move them in the right direction. As I had mentioned earlier we're also working very hard to green our own campus.

And so in the encyclical towards the end of it, the Pope talks about these small simple gestures that we can do on an everyday basis, you know, a person who adopts a small urban space, a fountain that's been let go or, you know, someone who turns off the lights, and does, you know, these really small gestures which become habits, which become then a praxis and an intentional way of living. So at the University of San Francisco what we're trying to do is create a whole culture where as we graduate our students, they gain this habitus, this habit of being environmentally very, very sensitive. And I hope they would choose then pathways that would make them change agents for the better, informed citizens, going into business world, going into public policy, going into science and healthcare but looking for ways for us in every practical way to lessen our carbon footprint. But



doing so always against this really broad picture of well, what about the least advantaged human beings on the planet? And that's what the Pope -- I think one of the nice things about this letter is that I think this the first time in such a systemic way that a world thinker, a world leader is linking climate change and the necessary changes in our behavior to care for the poor, the global poor.

**Greg Dalton:** Sam Liccardo, fossil fuel companies will often say fighting climate change will raise energy cost for low income Americans, it will hurt the poor. Is that true? Can you fight climate and help the poor at the same time?

**Sam Liccardo:** I think you can fight the climate and help the poor but it can still also be true that it's going to raise energy costs. And I think we have to have the courage to accept the fact we've had really cheap energy in the United States for a very long time relative to other industrialized nations and we can probably live with a little higher energy cost in order to reorient our economy.

**Greg Dalton:** I want to ask each of you when you think of climate and stewardship, is there a particular scripture that you think of, Paul? Paul Fitzgerald?

**Paul Fitzgerald:** I loved how Francis quoted Matthew, you know, the lilies at the field and the birds in the air, you know, are beautiful and God knows each one of them and invites us to have that same sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of the world around us. Something that, you know, as the climate has changed and the bay area has developed, you know, it's further from us -- it's further from me than it was 50 years ago in Los Gatos when birds and animals and nature seemed so much closer and so much more available.

**Greg Dalton:** It's a lost connection. Sally Bingham, a favorite passage.

**Rev. Canon Sally Bingham:** Yeah, my favorite is the first commandment, to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Because if you love your neighbor you're conscious of how your behavior affects your neighbors. And for me that's the -- I expand the word neighbor beyond the person that lives next door or sitting next to me, our neighbors are the next generation, our neighbors are the flora and fauna and animals.

And if we love our neighbors and operate out of love and understand that however we behave is affecting our neighbors, this is a wonderful scripture site for care for creation. Because creation is all of us too. I mean, it's everything. And if we care about everything and treat everything as a neighbor and love it, it'll make a big difference.

**Greg Dalton:** Sam Liccardo.

**Sam Liccardo:** I know I won't be quite as good at this as my colleagues here.

**Greg Dalton:** The professionals here. I've got two professionals right here. Playing in the big leagues here.

[Laughs]

**Sam Liccardo:** Yeah, I just think about the sermon, blessed are the poor in spirit they shall inherit earth. There's a certain connection that Pope Francis makes between how we are treating the earth and how we are treating fellow human beings and a connection that he said that those who are the poorest are most deeply impacted by environmental damage as well. And there's -- I think that connection bears out as well in the sermon.

**Greg Dalton:** We have to end it there. We've been listening to Paul Fitzgerald, president of the

University of San Francisco, Sam Liccardo, mayor of San Jose, California and Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, president and founder of Interfaith Power and Light. I'm Greg Dalton. I'd like to thank you all for listening here in the Commonwealth Club and online and on air. Thanks for joining us.

[Applause]

**Greg Dalton:** This conversation was recorded in 2015 after Pope Francis published his encyclical "Ladato Si." Pope Francis died Monday at the age of 88.