News
EarthBeat



A banner with an image of Pope Francis overlooks a street lined with cars Aug. 13 in Dublin ahead of the World Meeting of Families. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)



by Brian Roewe

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On the heels of Ireland's passage of a bill to divest the country from fossil fuels, its Catholic bishops followed suit as a response to the pope's call for the world to address climate change.

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference announced the move Aug. 24, as it played host to the World Meeting of Families and a two-day visit from Pope Francis.

The Irish bishops' conference said the divestment process will remove from its financial holdings the top 200 oil and gas companies, in terms of reserves, within a five-year period. The move, reached at the bishops' general meeting earlier this summer, comes a month after Ireland became the first country in the world to commit to divesting its investment fund of public money from peat, coal, oil and gas companies — estimated at a value more than 300 million euros.

"Avoiding further climate change and protecting our common home requires a major change in direction, as Pope Francis outlines in *Laudato Si'*," Bishop William Crean of Cloyne said in a statement, referencing the 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*."

"In particular, it requires a major shift in our energy and investment policies away from highly polluting fossil fuels towards cleaner renewable energy," the bishop said.

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The Irish bishops are the second bishops' conference to divest, following the Belgians, and join nearly 100 Catholic organizations to announce plans to cut fossil fuels from their portfolios — the majority doing so in the past two years through a program coordinated by the Global Catholic Climate Movement. Among the divesting Catholic groups are Caritas Internationalis; nine dioceses worldwide; several Catholic banks; more than two dozen religious congregations; and six Catholic institutions in Ireland.

That includes Trócaire, the Irish overseas development agency that has been active in assisting people at home and abroad impacted by a changing climate. The organization is credited as helping persuade the bishops' conference and other Catholic institutions in Ireland, including three Catholic universities, to make their own divestment commitments.

Crean, chairman of Trócaire, said that by divesting from fossil fuels, the Irish bishops "are responding directly to Pope Francis' call" in *Laudato Si*' where he said the world must shift away from its reliance on "highly polluting fossil fuels ... without delay" — a message the pope conveyed directly to energy and oil executives in June.

Throughout the triennial World Meeting of Families in Dublin, organizers emphasized sustainability and worked to intertwine Francis' environmental encyclical.

A garden at St. Damian's Monastery in Dublin offered daily biodiversity talks.

An "Our Common Home" tent offered daily workshops for teens and the main prayer space displayed a climate justice candle and photos. A creation-themed prayer was provided at meals and sustainability guides were distributed to vendors. A charging station allowed pilgrims to repower their phones with solar power.

On Aug. 23, Trócaire hosted a seminar on climate action where Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon, Myanmar was among the speakers.

An interfaith prayer service was held at Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral Aug. 24, the day before the pope's arrival, and where Crean officially announced the bishops' divestment to a standing ovation, according to reports on social media.

Jane Mellett, project coordinator for Our Common Home, said in a statement that stopping to unplug from daily technology and distractions can help connect people to nature and see it as a "beautiful gift" from God.

"Families are joy to the world, and by praying and caring for the Earth, our common home, we can deepen that joy," she said.

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