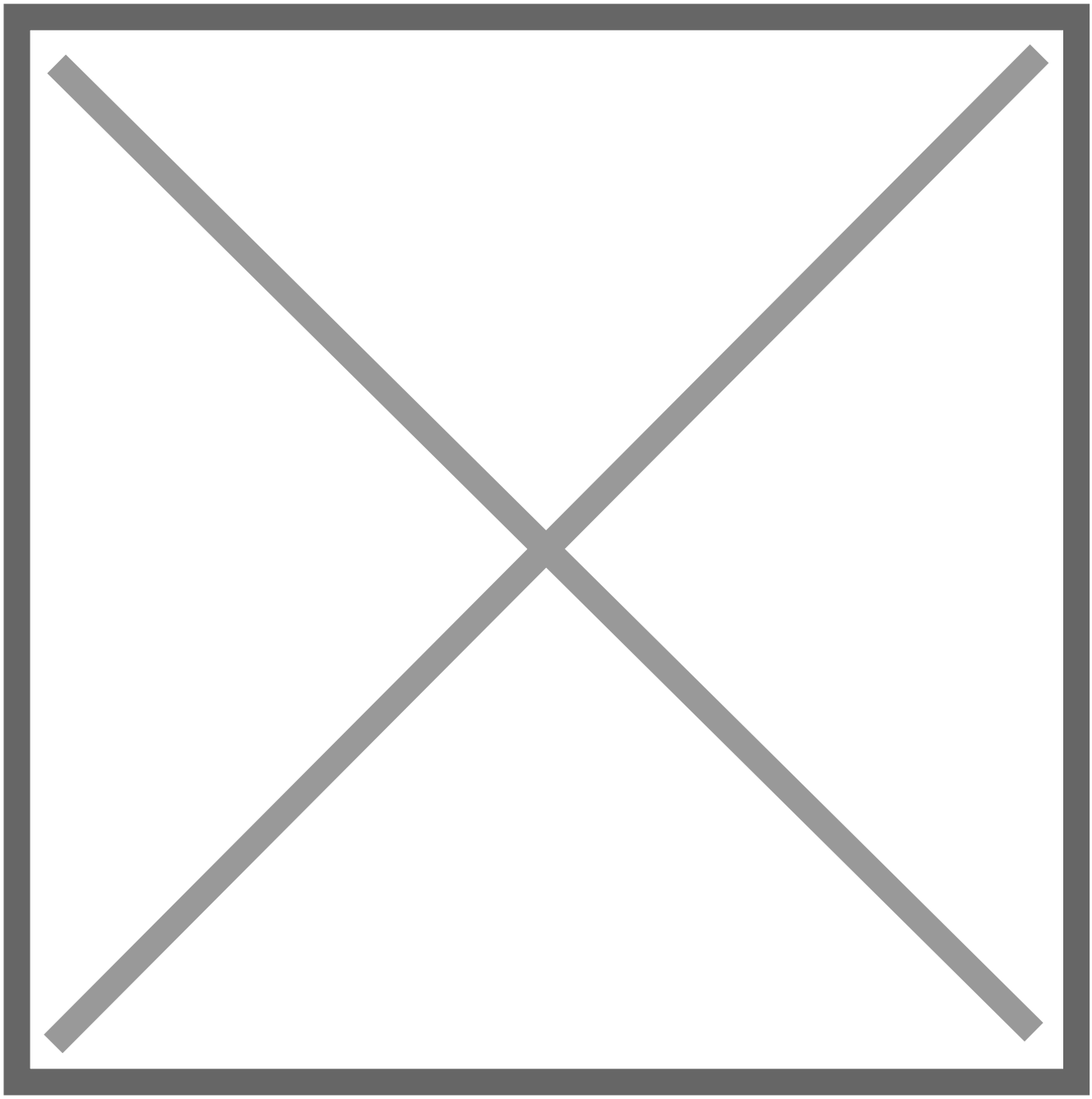


Students are pictured in a file photo putting plastic cups inside a whale shark sculpture in Santos, Brazil, that is designed to store collected recyclable waste from the beach. The Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro has launched a partnership with the Canadian company Plastic Bank to reduce plastic disposal into the oceans. (CNS/Reuters/Amanda Perobelli)



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The Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro has launched a partnership with a Canadian company to reduce plastic disposal into the oceans.

Church officials said the venture with Plastic Bank offers a more sustainable way to rid the oceans of dangerous plastic waste and falls in line with Pope Francis' plea to protect the earth in his encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

"This year in which we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the publication of 'Laudato Si', we are happy to announce this partnership, which is yet another concrete gesture from our archdiocese that engages in the care of the common home," said Cardinal Orani Joao Tempesta of Rio de Janeiro.

Called the Program of Faith, the project launched Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Cardinal Tempesta presided at Mass at the Our Lady of Penha Sanctuary to mark its start.

"With simple gestures, we will eliminate plastics from our homes, streets and rivers, and prevent them from reaching the oceans," the cardinal said.

At the launch, Cleiton Ramos, faith program coordinator for Plastic Bank in Brazil, gave Cardinal Tempesta a rosary made from ropes that are often discarded in the ocean by fishermen in Indonesia. It was presented in a box made of recycled plastic.

The gift, Ramos said, was similar to the one given to Pope Francis in 2017 by Plastic Bank founder and CEO David Katz.

Plastic Bank is a partner of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Anderson Correa Neto attended the launch. He told Catholic News Service that he was so impressed with the program that he and his family immediately volunteered to separate the plastic donations at the sanctuary.

"People don't know what to do with the dozens of plastic water bottles, shampoo bottles and detergent bottles they have around," he said. "These plastics end up going into our rivers and oceans."

Correa Neto said the community has gotten behind the project and that while people are still leery about leaving their homes because of the coronavirus pandemic, collection bins are filling faster than volunteers can go through them.

"Now on Sunday afternoons, I come with my 13- and 16-year-old daughters and my wife to separate and bag the plastic so that the company can take it away during the week," Correa Neto said.

The project also has been implemented at the Sao Martinho Association, run by the Carmelite province of St. Elias. The association hosts a program for homeless children, giving them meals and a place to stay during the day.

"Pope Francis is a man tuned to his time. When the pope thought about this encyclical, he made a very strong criticism of consumerism and irresponsible development. It calls for change and global unification to combat environmental degradation and climate change," said Deacon Valdinei Martins, an association coordinator.

With the apparent early success of the program, Ramos said plans are underway to expand it.

"Our goal is to have collecting bins in at least 20 parishes in the city by December and at least 40 by the middle of next year as well as expanding to other states in Brazil," he said.

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