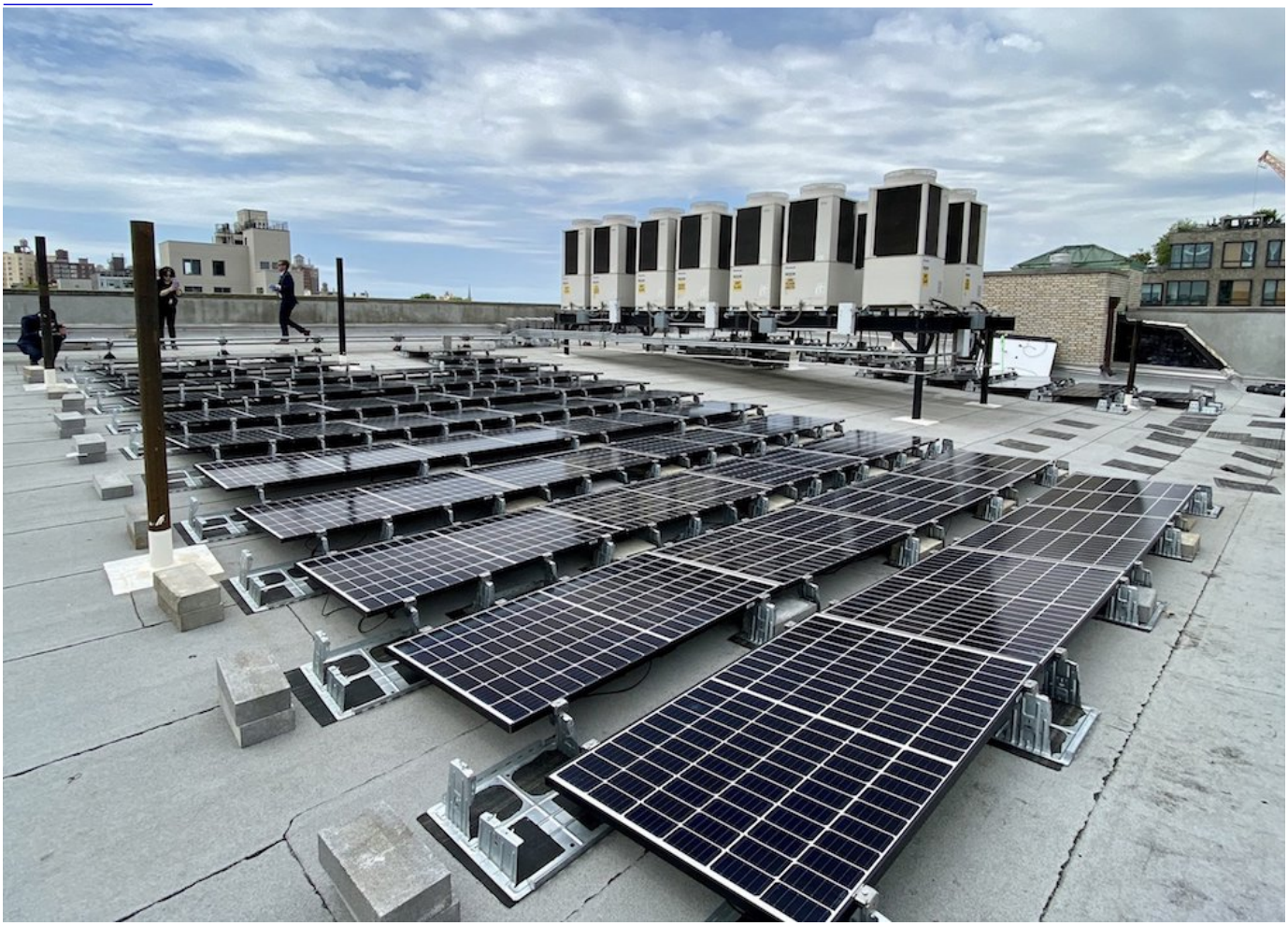
News
EarthBeat



Solar panels in New York City are seen atop the Bishop Thomas V. Daily Residence in the Prospect Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. It is the first of four buildings receiving panels in a pilot project for the affordable housing units managed by Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corp. (CNS photo/Bill Miller, The Tablet)

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Brooklyn, New York — June 21, 2021
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Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn cut the ceremonial ribbon June 10 for a solar-energy project launched to answer Pope Francis' "urgent challenge" to battle climate change and "protect our common home."

The pope's environmental concerns, including climate change, are set out in "*Laudato Si*'," his 2015 encyclical and second such letter as pope.

In response, Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens has formed the Laudato Si Corporation, a green-energy initiative to generate renewable energy with arrays of photovoltaic solar panels mounted on the rooftops of residential buildings across the Brooklyn Diocese.

The buildings are managed by Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corporation, the agency's affordable housing developer.

Among them is the Bishop Thomas V. Daily Residence in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Prospect Heights, which will be the first building to receive solar panels, and was the site of the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Daily, who died in 2017, was Brooklyn's bishop from 1990 until his retirement in 2003.



Flanked by staff of Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corp. and other partners, Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, New York, cuts the ribbon to inaugurate the new diocesan program to install solar arrays on public housing buildings. (CNS photo/Bill Miller, The Tablet)

Before he cut the ribbon, DiMarzio recounted how the pope's encyclical inspired the diocese to accelerate plans for sustainable energy in residential buildings operated by Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens. Subsequently, in 2018, the bishop led an ecumenical delegation to the Vatican to present plans for the Laudato Si Corporation to Pope Francis.

"He gave us great encouragement," DiMarzio told the audience. "We had Buddhist members and Catholic members, and so it was a great day. Now we see the fruits of that work."

In "*Laudato Si*'," Pope Francis wrote: "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change."

DiMarzio added, "We're trying to make ourselves part and parcel of God's creation, using all the things that God has given us, especially the sun, which produces so much energy."

Catholic Charities in the Brooklyn Diocese is one of the largest faith-based providers of affordable housing in the U.S. It currently has 4,330 units of affordable homes in 44 buildings, with 240 more units under construction.

Besides the agency's Daily residence, three of its other residential buildings are expected to receive similar solar panel installations by the end of this summer.

Tim McManus, senior vice president of Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corporation, known as POP, said the first four buildings are considered a pilot project.

"And we certainly have a number of buildings that we've lined up to do a phase two," he added.

McManus noted, however, that some buildings managed by POP aren't suitable for the project.

"Not all of our buildings have a large enough rooftop," he said. "So, we plan to do as much as possible where it makes financial sense."

But McManus noted the solar panels are expected to pay for themselves as the electricity they produce gets "pumped back in the grid."

"The other unique thing about this approach is with the panels, we will be selling energy back to Con Ed and Con Ed will be paying us for the energy we're providing," he said, referring to Consolidated Edison, Inc., the local electricity provider. "And we will be using the revenue generated through this to reinvest in those other buildings, where traditionally, you would have to go get a loan."

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The Laudato Si Corporation will also participate in an "inclusive community solar agreement," which will sell solar power to subscribers who prefer to get their electricity from local, renewable sources. Proceeds from those sales would help fund other initiatives of the corporation, McManus said.

The Nixon Peabody law firm provided pro bono legal advice to form the new corporation. Bright Power, an energy and water management partner, is designing and installing the solar arrays. Other assistance came from the Advanced Energy Research and Technology Center of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

DiMarzio thanked all of them in his remarks. He concluded by saying Pope Francis' call for action on climate change is appropriately urgent, adding that damage to the environment is not easily repaired.

"We cannot abuse creation," the bishop said. "Pope Francis has said, God forgives all the time, people forgive some of the time, but nature never forgives. So we cannot destroy the nature that God has given to us."

"That's why we take seriously our responsibility to preserve nature as God has given it to us. That's why the Holy Father is taking this stand," DiMarzio added.

"It's not just an economic issue, but an issue for the whole world, and for everybody's benefit, especially the poor people who seem to get the brunt of every ecological disaster," the bishop concluded. "It is the people who are the poorest that really suffer the most."