125-page report describes progress on environmental protection and difficulties faced by par

125-page report describes progress on environmental protection and difficulties faced by parishes and other church institutions in responding to climate change. Demonstrators hold signs during the Global Climate Strike of the movement Fridays for Future movement Oct. 22 in Berlin. (CNS/Michele Tantussi, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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The Catholic Church should take a leading role in protecting the environment and addressing climate change, said the bishop who is the commissioner for environmental and climate issues at the German bishops' conference.

"We take our responsibility for creation seriously. As the Catholic Church, we should not sit at the back of the train but rather be at the front as far as possible," Bishop Rolf Lohmann said during a presentation Oct. 25 in Bonn of the German Catholic Church's first report on climate and environmental protection.

Lohmann said the report outlines progress on environmental protection as well as difficulties that individual parishes and other church entities face in responding to climate change, the German Catholic news agency KNA reported.

The 125-page study summarizes current climate protection measures being taken by individual dioceses, church organizations and aid agencies. Priorities cited include

environmentally friendly building management, mobility and sustainable economics.

In initial reactions, a government official and aid organizations praised the report. Germany's environment minister, Svenja Schulze, called the report an important sociopolitical signal.

"The Catholic dioceses, religious orders, associations and laypeople's organizations are actors who provide greater sustainability locally with climate protection concepts," she said.

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Bishop Heiner Wilmer of Hildesheim, who is responsible for social affairs for the bishops' conference, said political, business and social leaders expected the church to be involved in addressing the most pressing issues of the age.

Pope Francis, he explained, was calling on the world and religious leaders to act immediately and effectively against climate change.

"The prerequisite of a credible presence is that you also apply to yourself the standards you advocate," Wilmer said, adding that the German Catholic Church was now being accountable on environmental matters.

Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen said the fight against climate change was the greatest social challenge facing the world and that churches must respond.

"Time is pressing," he said.

Fr. Dirk Bingener, president of Missio, the German Catholic humanitarian relief agency, also welcomed the document, saying it highlighted the extent to which the global church and church-related relief agencies were allies in the fight against climate change.

The report, he said, showed "that environmental destruction violates fundamental rights of children and young people in the global South."