An aerial view taken in 2023 shows solar panels installed by Mission Energy at the Passionists

An aerial view taken in 2023 shows solar panels installed by Mission Energy at the Passionists' provincial office at Immaculate Conception Monastery in the New York borough of Queens. Mission Energy manages the Catholic Energies program, an initiative of the Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant, which helps Catholic facility owners with starting solar energy projects. (OSV News/courtesy Mission Energy)

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Two provinces of the Congregation of the Passion and a lay-run Catholic nonprofit have all taken the lead in switching to solar energy to power their work as part of their response to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*', which teaches on the relationship between God, humans and the Earth in caring for creation.

The Passionist provinces are working with Catholic Energies, an initiative of the Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant, which helps Catholic facility owners with starting solar energy projects.

"Converting to solar energy from traditional energy has been a big change for our order, and Catholic Energies has two priorities when working with its clients: the creation of clean energy and the saving of money," said Fr. Jim O'Shea, the provincial for the Passionists of St. Paul of the Cross Eastern Province headquartered in Jamaica, New York.

O'Shea professed his vows in 1985 and began doing community advocacy in 1997 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, New York, where he helped secure more affordable housing and establish a Cristo Rey Network high school for low-income families in Brooklyn.

"The Catholic Climate Covenant was launched with help from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and helps to lead our church's response to address climate change," Dan Misleh, the founding executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, told OSV News.

Among the organization's projects are a 2 megawatt ground array for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, offsetting 100% of its buildings' electrical usage, and rooftop projects that have allowed parishes to offset 90-100% of electrical usage.

Misleh also noted that Catholic Energies "seeks to assist Catholic facility owners with solar energy projects, and we also encourage Catholic clients to use their new solar array as a teachable moment, reminding their constituents of the need to care for God's creation — a core principle of Catholic social doctrine."

Mission Energy, a for-profit company, is the organization that manages the nonprofit Catholic Energies program.

Catholic Energies has converted three of the Passionist order's sites in New York, West Hartford, Connecticut, and — just since this past September — San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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"We have worked closely with Catholic Energies, because they run the whole project," O'Shea said. "We contribute the land — or make it available to them — (for) potential construction, and provide the actual places to put the panels, which in this

instance were our monastery's car port, the rooftop of our school and an open field."

Passionist Br. John Monzyk told OSV News the Passionist monastery in Louisville, Kentucky — part of the Passionists of the Holy Cross Province headquartered in Illinois — houses seven of the priests and brothers, with two more priests living at the rectory and two others residing in nearby nursing homes.

Monzyk explained that their solar energy project came online Feb. 7, 2022, and consists of 60 panels located on the roof of the car port.

"We had considered using generators at first, but ruled them due to size and maintenance decisions," Monzyk said.

He said they opted to go with solar panels that charge two batteries and provide backup energy for the kitchen and pantry areas, essential for keeping the food safe.

Annually, the solar investment for the year can see savings of a few hundred dollars by June, according to Monzyk.

But the move also protects the monastery financially from the upward trajectory of energy costs. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the average monthly electric bill for residential customers increased 13% from 2021-2022, or 5% after adjusting for inflation. Extreme temperatures and higher fuel costs for power plants, the agency said, have played a significant role in driving up electric bills.

Besides savings, another key benefit of this changeover is that maintenance is minimal.

Fr. Joe Mitchell, who resides at the Passionist community in Louisville and is president of the Passionist Earth and Spirit Center — a 27-acre nature sanctuary camp replete with courses, workshops, summer camps, retreats, and ecological service opportunities — told OSV News that many leading environmental thinkers have called the pope's 2015 encyclical "one of the greatest documents of its kind."

He said, "It highlights perhaps the most pressing needs of our time, especially in how it focuses on the care and non-exploitative sharing of our common home — which is the Earth."