News
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Jose Aguto, who has resigned as executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, is seen in a file photo. (Courtesy of Catholic Climate Covenant)



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Editor's note: *This article has been updated with additional information and comments from Dan Misleh.*

Jose Aguto has resigned as executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, the lead organization in the U.S. Catholic Church in promoting awareness and action on climate change and environmental justice in the church.

News of Aguto's departure was confirmed April 4. He announced his decision to step down to the Covenant board of directors in mid-March. He will stay on board during the next few weeks to assist with the transition.

Dan Misleh, founder of the Covenant, is set to become interim executive director, "in preparation for discernment about the future," according to board president Scott Hurd, vice president for leadership formation with Catholic Charities USA.

In a statement to EarthBeat, Hurd said, "The board of directors is grateful for Jose's service and the legacy he leaves, and assures him of prayer and every good wish as he embarks on new paths where he can share his vision, passion, and talents."

Misleh told EarthBeat that "Jose put his all" into his work with the Covenant during his seven years with the organization.

The Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant formed in 2006. It consists of 20 national partner organizations, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and some of the largest Catholic institutions and religious orders in the country. Among them are the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Health Association, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The Covenant has led many initiatives to engage and connect U.S. Catholics around climate change and creation care. That has included annual Earth Day programs, regular webinars, a network of parish creation care teams, and promotion of Pope

Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home." On that front, the Covenant has co-hosted three national conferences aimed at raising the response of the U.S. church to *Laudato Si'*, with the final one held last summer.

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The Covenant is the coordinating organization for U.S. participation in the Vatican-led Laudato Si' Action Platform, a multiyear program in which Catholic institutions of all sizes are encouraged to take steps to become more sustainable, such as switching to clean energy, reducing food and plastic waste, incorporating ecological spirituality into liturgy, and more.

Aguto joined the Covenant in 2017 as associate director and became executive director in September 2021, succeeding Misleh in the position. Under his leadership, the Covenant has expanded its work on policy advocacy and youth outreach, and has made inroads into environmental justice matters.

In 2022, the Covenant began a campaign to connect Catholics with their U.S. senators, especially Catholic members, to urge passage of a major federal climate bill, what ultimately became the Inflation Reduction Act. That legislation directed more than $300 billion toward clean energy, representing the largest federal investment on climate change in the nation's history.

Aguto also placed special emphasis on amplifying Catholic attention to environmental justice matters, where the effects of pollution and fossil fuel production impact nearby communities, with Black and Hispanic communities often affected the most.

In one instance, Aguto helped the Covenant connect with Sharon Lavigne, a Goldman Environmental Prize winner and Catholic grandmother who is a leader in resisting the expansion of petrochemical facilities in her community in southern Louisiana, in an area often referred to as "Cancer Alley."

The 2022 recipient of the University of Notre Dame's Laetare Medal, Lavigne is now a member of the Covenant's board of directors.

Recent years have seen the Covenant expand as well in working with and uplifting youth leadership. This year marked the third annual Catholic Youth Climate Summit

in Chicago, as well as the first year the summit expanded to other cities, including Boston.

The Covenant also launched the Wholemakers curriculum in 2023, a resource developed by and for young adults that "weaves together the latest climate science with insights from the Catholic tradition to equip youth and young adults to be the faithful protagonists of transformation the world needs."

A graduate of Brown University and Villanova Law School, Aguto previously worked with the Quaker-focused Friends Committee on National Legislation and the American Indian Environmental Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, he was a member of the 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army.

As for the Covenant's future, Misleh said it remains "full steam ahead."

"We believe we are doing some great work, and we will continue to do so," he said.