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Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey speaks during a summit, titled "From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience," at the headquarters of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences at the Vatican May 15, 2024. (CNS/Courtesy the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences)



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Faith leaders must collaborate with public and private partners to set an example on combating climate change for the communities they serve, Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey said while standing in the Vatican Gardens.

"People look to their faith leaders", she told Catholic News Service on the sidelines of a Vatican conference May 15. "It's incredibly powerful and important for faith leaders to be talking about climate and to be working with others in government, in business, in philanthropy, in academe on these issues."

The governor traveled to the Vatican for a three-day summit of scholars and government leaders to discuss developing climate resilience; six governors were scheduled to participate in the meeting including California Gov. Gavin Newsom and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, as well as 18 mayors, including Boston Mayor Michelle Wu.

After the summit's first session, Healey told CNS that Catholic leaders such as Pope Francis and Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston are figures with "concern and care for the most vulnerable among us," particularly those greatly impacted by climate change.

"Looking out for the poor, looking out for people who are disproportionately burdened by the climate crisis is who they are," the governor said.

Healey also expressed her appreciation for the "human-centered approach" that the cardinal and Francis have in confronting social issues, including migration and housing for vulnerable and low-income people.

Delivering a keynote address at the summit, Healey announced the launch of the Climate Careers Fund to train people for in-demand, skilled climate jobs such as electricians and EV mechanics in Massachusetts. The pilot program seeks to dedicate $10 million in philanthropic resources and public funding to fill climate workforce gaps.

Massachusetts aims to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and to meet its greenhouse gas reduction mandates the state will need to train 34,000 workers for climate sector jobs by 2030, according to a statement from the governor's office.

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Healey said she announced the training fund at the Vatican because "it's so resonant with everything that Pope Francis stands for and represents," namely, the "humanity" involved in the fight against climate change.

The Climate Careers Fund, she said, "is a human-centered approach to addressing climate change."

"We can have all the goals and targets that we want, but we're not going to get there unless we have the human capital and the human resources and the workforce able to do that," the governor said.

The summit's first session May 15 included speeches by the governor of Vihiga County, Kenya, and the mayors of Rome and São Paulo.

Melissa Hoffer, climate chief for the state of Massachusetts, told CNS that a unifying theme among local communities represented at the summit is the need to find creative ways of financing climate-related initiatives.

"What to do is not really too much of a question," she said, but finding the funds to implement action is. Hoffer said, for example, that "electrifying buses is expensive, finding the garage locations, the real estate, the infrastructure to charge them is expensive, so how are we going to do that?"

In his address, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a climate scientist at the University of California, San Diego, said that while most of the focus on combating climate change revolves around mitigating emissions, more action must be taken to advance adaptation of communities to rising temperatures and sea levels — an effort in which local leadership will be key.

Ramanathan said he hopes that more local leaders will attend the next U.N. Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, and he asked that nations "facilitate a stronger voice for mayors and governors."