

Should Catholic churches keep drilling for oil?

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Some Catholic churches in the United States are leasing out their lands for drills by oil and gas companies, despite Pope Francis's persistent push on climate action.

Texas and Oklahoma county records reveal "235 oil and gas leasing deals signed by Catholic Church authorities . . . since 2010, covering 56 counties across the two states," according to Reuters.

This does not square easily with the pope's repeated calls to reduce fossil fuel use in order to combat climate change.

In June, the pope focused exclusively on the environment in his first global encyclical. Pope Francis condemned the "structurally perverse" economic system of the rich exploiting the poor and destroying the planet, and he called for "drastically" reducing fossil fuel use and developing renewable energy.

Afterward, many anticipated local churches and dioceses would take rapid steps to fall in line, as Father Michael Crosby, a leading climate activist and a Capuchin Franciscan priest from Milwaukee, told the *Nation*: "I expect that every Catholic institution in the country will step back and review all their practices—their teaching and preaching, their operations and investments—to determine whether they are in line with Pope Francis' powerful call to action."

But not everyone embraced the pope's message. Church officials in Oklahoma City "have signed three new oil and gas leases since Francis's missive on the environment," Reuters reported.

Since the divestment push began in March, some Catholic churches in the U.S. dragged their heels in joining the effort—even after the pope's encyclical. "They don't understand it," said Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the retired archbishop of Washington, D.C. "They don't understand the complexities."

The easy money from fossil fuel drilling may be just too appealing. In late 2013, a drilling site owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles was shut down after toxic fumes poisoned residents of the low-income South LA community.

The church did not cancel the lease. In a statement, the archdiocese said that although it "cannot unilaterally change the leases to stop oil drilling and has no control of the site, the health and well-being of the entire community is always a priority; that is why we support public safety and air quality regulations."

The oil drilling company paid more than \$99,000 in fines and spent \$700,000 on upgrades, and is now set to restart operations, reports the *Los Angeles Times*. Residents have asked the pope to intervene to prevent more drilling on the two acres leased from the local archdiocese.

"My 12-year-old daughter hasn't had a nosebleed or dizzy spell since AllenCo closed down," said Gabriela Garcia, a community organizer. "Our goal is to persuade the pope to call the Los Angeles archbishop and say, 'Hey, this is an opportunity to put my encyclical into action at the ground level.' "