

Hundreds of religious sisters call for cleaner economy

More than 200 Catholic sisters from across Canada want Ottawa to deny a bailout to the oil and gas industry and invest in building a cleaner, low-carbon economy after COVID-19.

A letter from the nuns is scheduled to land on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's desk May 25, the day after the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' groundbreaking encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. It also marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

In addition to urging the federal government to resist propping up the oil and gas industry, the letter asks Ottawa to spend money to retrain the industry's workers and help them find jobs elsewhere, plus invest in energy efficiency, renewable energy and public transit.

"In light of this anniversary, as a community of faithful Catholics, we are taking a pledge to shape our individual and community choices with care for all creation," reads the letter.

"We are urging the Canadian government to join this commitment and take immediate, concrete actions to flatten the curve of global warming and move towards a just and sustainable future."

The Joint Environmental Ministries (JEM) network of Catholic religious orders – most of them religious women – is hoping for 400 signatures on their letter by May 22.

Their demand that the government "not commit public resources to the oil and gas industry, which is already heavily subsidized," is not an attack on Alberta, said organizer Sr. Margot Ritchie of the Sisters of St. Joseph in London, Ont.

"First of all, I don't hate Alberta. Certainly the letter and the action we're proposing does not come from that place," Ritchie said.

The letter arose after COVID-19 caused JEM to cancel its annual meeting in Toronto, which was to include oilsands workers and other Alberta voices which support a transition away from oil and gas.

"The time to act is now," said the JEM network letter. "The COVID-19 recession, combined with the climate emergency, demands us to be creative in imagining new ways of running our economy. Let's make the most of this opportunity."

If there's one thing the sisters have learned from *Laudato Si'*, it's that

decisions have to be made, said Ritchie.

“This is humanity’s kairos moment,” she said. “We should take a deep breath and imagine the world we want and take measures to create it.”