

Pope, Bono launch Scholas educational initiative

ROME (CNS) – Celebrating the launch of the Scholas International Educational Movement and its environmental project, Pope Francis encouraged young people, especially women, to lead the charge in fighting climate change.

“Defending nature means defending the poetry of creation, it means defending harmony. It is a fight for harmony. And women know more about harmony than us men,” the pope said May 19 during an event at Rome’s Pontifical Urban University.

U2 frontman Bono, who joined the pope for the launch, said he had been a supporter of Scholas for the past four years and was “drawn to this idea of a ‘culture of encounter.’”

Scholas began in Pope Francis’ Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, supporting education in poor neighborhoods by pairing their schools with private schools and institutions in wealthier neighborhoods.

The organization has spread to other countries and supports a variety of exchange programs aimed at promoting education, encouraging creativity and teaching young people about respect, tolerance and peace.

Citing its continuing expansion across the globe, the pope signed a decree changing Scholas Occurrentes’ status from a pontifical foundation to “an international association of the faithful.” The decree was published May 17.

During the event May 19, Bono praised the papal decree, which he said, “adopts inclusivity into canon law” and gives a voice to young people doing their part to fight poverty and climate change through education.

The Irish singer also took the opportunity to ask the pope a question.

“Girls’ education is a superpower in fighting extreme poverty and I would like to ask His Holiness if he thinks that women and girls play the same powerful role in tackling the climate crisis,” he said.

“We usually speak of ‘Mother Earth,’ not ‘Father Earth,’” the pope replied with a smile, prompting applause from Bono and the audience. “Also, as I told you earlier, from the moment of the apple (in the Garden of Eden), they are in charge,” the pope added.

Pope Francis said that now as an international association, Scholas Occurrentes can help unite even more young people to protect “the harmony of creation.”

“Now it is in your hands,” the pope said. “Hopefully it isn’t too late because there is work to do.”