NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Philippines' Earth Chapel is country's first solar-powered church structure

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MANILA, Philippines -- A new chapel for reflection on creation and ecology at a central Philippines Catholic university, built by local artists using mud, bamboo, bottles and other indigenous materials, is the first solar-powered religious structure in the country.

The Earth Chapel, [1] which can be found in the Greenheart Hermitage section of University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos, is the work of project head Augustinian Recollects Brother Jaazeal Jakosalem and two other artists from the province who advocate protection of the environment, Jakosalem said.

Fr. Cornelio Moral of the Augustinian Recollects blessed the chapel, which uses rice hay and stalk as well as grass, on March 19. LED lights brighten the chapel interior as light passes through wine bottles cleverly recycled for a stained-glass window effect.

The project cost 50,000 pesos ($1,100) to build, Jakosalem told *NCR*. The money for the chapel came "mostly from the sales of the plastic bottles we have collected," he said.

The solar panel was donated by the university's Supreme Student Government.

"Volunteer students and university personnel worked hand in hand to build the Earth Chapel," Jakosalem said. He said 12 students, ecological stewards of Greenheart Hermitage, worked for no pay, and the work took 40 days with the help of two carpenters for the bamboo work.

Jakosalem, an official presenter of the Climate Reality Project [2], figured out how to incorporate renewable energy into the structure and make the chapel true to form and function in its liturgical scheme.

The completion of the chapel comes as environmental groups around the country prepare to join the Earth Hour [3] global event March 31 organized by World Wildlife Fund. Held every last Saturday of March since its inception in Sydney in 2008, Earth Hour asks households and businesses to shut off nonessential lights for one hour to raise awareness of the need to take action on climate change.

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[1] http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/165923
[2] http://climaterealityproject.org/
[3] http://www.earthhour.org/