



Missionary Society of St. Columban
2020 Laudato Si' Week Message

Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. LS 42

May 24, 2020 marks the 5th anniversary of the release of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. From the Americas to Asia, from Oceania to Europe, Columbans around the world celebrate the 5th anniversary and the Laudato Si' message, especially in its call for integral ecology which is a holistic approach to care for our common home that draws on faith, science, education, advocacy, and lifestyle transformation. Columban eco-theologian Sean McDonagh and author of, *The Death of Life* (2005), on biodiversity describes this encyclical as, "the single most important piece of Catholic Social Teaching each of the last 100 years and essential to every Catholic's formation for the next 100 years."

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic limitations, Columbans are organizing and joining in Laudato Si' Week webinars in places like Chile, Fiji, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, Philippines, and USA. Themes like biodiversity, spirituality, economy, post-COVID world, integral ecology are all being explored from local and global perspectives.

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary, Columbans highlight the fragile state of biodiversity as essential to the work of living Laudato Si. Pope Francis states clearly that biodiversity is under major threat and that,

"The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." LS 33

Laudato Si' also reaches into the depths of our hope and reminds us that we are co-laborers in God's creative work. Columbans with our local and global partners like the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Sierra Madre Network in the Philippines, and REPAM (Ecclesial Network for PanAmazonia) in Latin America collaboratively work in the garden that is Laudato Si'. For example:

In China, Columbans have initiated experiential ecology workshops for religious sisters with the purpose to enhance the participants' appreciation for the diversity, beauty and mystery of the natural world, God's creation. Over a period of four years three workshops were held under the guidance of a visiting geologist and botanist, a person of deep Christian faith who believes in the importance of personal encounter in the long journey of awakening our minds and hearts to the diversity of life in the natural world. A combination of lectures, nature walks, and the use of microscopes to look into the mystical depths of small flowers and the insects that live there, leads participants to seeing the natural world in a new way, and therefore brings about a new



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understanding of the mysterious depths of the Creator. Our hope is that their experience will lead to a sharing of their insights with people in their local communities.

In Myanmar, biodiversity is a reflection of the diversity of its peoples. Tribes and languages are as numerous as the country's flora and fauna species. And their lives are intertwined and interconnected. When we protect biodiversity, we are also protecting the peoples specially the indigenous peoples of Myanmar, who call the forests, the plains, the hills and mountains their home. Columbans in Myanmar collaborate with dioceses in education and experiential learning about the many themes and spirituality of Laudato Si'.

In Pakistan, we are trying to raise awareness on environmental issues in parishes, community groups and schools and bring Laudato Si' alive in the diocese, especially during Season of Creation. Our work also involves training environmental activists in community groups and schools and practical activities such as tree plantation and environmental campaigns.

In the UK, Columban JPIC produced a special issue of the *Vocation for Justice* newsletter to coincide with the Laudato Si' anniversary titled 'Jubilee for the Earth'. One article focuses on Columban work with school groups, helping young people to encounter nature, and supporting the youth strikes for the climate. Another is by a young winner of the Columban young journalists' competition who wrote about the problems of our "throwaway culture". [Click Here](#) to read the full newsletter.

We conclude our celebratory message with gratitude for the gift of Laudato Si' and this prayer for the Earth in Laudato Si':

A prayer for our earth
All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that
exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
[...]

Teach us to discover the worth of each
thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace. Amen.

Fr. Tim Mulroy, SSC
Superior General

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