



# International JPIC Newsletter Environmental Justice

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Missionary Society of St. Columban**



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## **"Darkness in between the light"**

*By Amy Woolam Echeverria, Co-Editor*

On January 1, 2020, I wrote in my journal, "New day, new year, new decade. Familiar hopes of healing and deepening peace surface. New hopes like boldness and audacity also emerge. These are both personal and for the world." Six months later, the world is amidst a health pandemic that has taken our breath away, literally and figuratively. We are also in a pandemic of violence, poverty, racism, militarism, ecological destruction, discrimination that has never gone away. It's a dark panorama.

I've been pondering darkness a lot lately. Recently, I was speaking to a friend of mine who lives in Australia. She was telling me about a book called *Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe. You may know it. In this book, Pascoe reveals that for Aboriginal people in Australia, it is the darkness between the stars that captures their imagination when looking at the night sky. It is the darkness, not the light, that reveals the mystery.

I suppose as Christians, we have long wrestled with this paradox of light and dark. Mystics like St. John of the Cross developed his entire spirituality around this notion of finding meaning in the darkness. This month's issue of the newsletter is focused on the Society's work

in the area of Ecology. In many ways, this work is like seeing the darkness in between the stars.

Unlike hearing the cry of the people which is more understood and translatable to our human ears, hearing the cry of the earth invites a different kind of listening. It requires a kind of contemplative leaning-in-to in order to grasp meaning that is not immediately comprehensible. Of course the real drama of climate change, water deprivation, extractive industries are all clear cries that scientists and others interpret for us. But the non-human natural world beckons us to go deeper into the silence of the cosmic night, or the stillness of the deep sea, or the coolness of earth.

The stories in this month's edition speak to all the ways we as a Society are listening to the cries and songs of the earth. Like Pascoe suggests, we are still tuning in to the ears and eyes of our hearts to the darkness in between the light, but I think as we do, we will find great illumination there.

In peace & gratitude,

Amy



## **"Protagonists of their own destiny"**

By Wesley Coccozello, Co-Editor

For the past two weeks, there have been uprisings across the United States, and uprisings of solidarity across the world, against racial violence and police militarization. I'm using the word "uprising" instead of "riot" or "protest" at the invitation of Dr. Ashley Howard, an American academic who studies racial uprisings from the 1960s. By calling what is happening an "uprising," we acknowledge the agency of black and brown folks trying to make themselves heard to an indifferent and callous power structure. The word acknowledges that these people are, and always have been, the protagonists of their own destiny. You can read CCAO's statement on this [here](#).

As a white person, I have tried to make sure that when I participate in these uprisings I am taking my lead from people of color. This moment reminds me (and I always need reminding) to "let a like unlike my own be my teacher."

I have also been grappling with what it means to live in a country that teaches me that white is the "default," that the white experience is the story most worth telling. Dr. Robin DiAngelo, author of the book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, puts it best when she says in an interview that "the message of segregation is that there is no inherent value in the perspective and experiences of people of color."

To help solve racial injustice then, white folks are going to have to stretch their imaginations so that we are no longer at the center of it. Not only do we need to see black and brown folks as the protagonists of their own destiny, we need to also see them as co-protagonists of our own.

I bring all this up in a newsletter about our Society's work for environmental justice because I believe the same mindset that produces racial violence in the United States

(and around the world) is the same mindset that produces environmental violence too.

In her most recent book, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*, theologian Dr. Elizabeth Johnson writes that "the problem resides in a tyrannical anthropology. We loom so large in our own minds that we block out the others around us."

As a society we admonish anthropomorphizing non-human creatures, and while I am not pretending to make a scientific claim here, perhaps we shrink away from anthropomorphizing them because to do so would require us to face-up to the incredible violence we have perpetuated against them. It is similar I think to the resistance we may feel towards confronting our complicity with racist structures and institutions.

But to not face up to this complicity is to treat others as disposable, as obstacles to our numbing comfort. We see this most clearly with the world's failure to adequately address climate change, which disproportionately harms black and brown communities.

Just as the mindset that produces racial and environmental violence is the same, so too is part of the solution: humans must begin to see the rest of creation as protagonists of their own destiny and as co-protagonists in ours.

Scripture reminds us that "the lot of mortals and the lot of beasts is the same lot: the one dies as well as the other. Both have the same life breath. Human beings have no advantage over beasts, but all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 3: 19). I pray that this moment of racial uprisings (and the uprising of nature itself) is enough to shake us from our vanity. ▀



## Columban Podcast Series on Biodiversity

The Columban biodiversity working group is producing a podcast mini-series about the threat of biodiversity loss, what Catholic Social Teaching and Columban experience can teach us about this issue, and the work being done to help protect God’s creation.

Six episodes will be released each week during the Season of Creation, which starts on September 1 (the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation) and ends on October 4 (the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi).

Each episode will be led by “dialogue partners,” with narration by Wesley Cocozello.

### Episode 1

- **Theme:** Creation as Incarnation, biodiversity and *Laudato Si’*
- **Dialogue partners:** Fr. Dan Troy and John Feehan
- **Release Date:** August 31

### Episode 2

- **Theme:** Economic Models and Biodiversity
- **Dialogue partners:** John Din and Rebecca Eastwood
- **Release Date:** September 7

### Episode 3

- **Theme:** IRD and Biodiversity
- **Dialogue partners:** Fr. Liam O’Callaghan, invited guest(s)
- **Release Date:** September 14

### Episode 4

- **Theme:** Peace and Biodiversity
- **Dialogue partners:** Fr. Pat Cunningham, Ellen Teague, and Scott Wright
- **Release Date:** September 21

### Episode 5

- **Theme:** Migrants, Refugees, IDps, and Biodiversity
- **Dialogue partners:** Fr. Kurt Zion Pala and Scott Wright
- **Release Date:** September 28

### Episode 6

- **Theme:** Spirituality and Biodiversity
- **Dialogue partners:** Fr. Sean McDonagh and Amy Echeverria
- **Release Date:** October 5

## Upcoming JPIC Days of Prayer & Action

- **June 12:** World Day Against Child Labor
- **July 30:** World Day against trafficking in Person
- **Aug 9:** International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples
- **Sept 1 - Oct 4:** Season of Creation

## Upcoming Newsletters and Submission Deadlines

Release Month	Theme	Deadline
September	People on the Move	August 15
December	Peace and Nonviolence	November 15

Please email your submissions to Amy Woolam Echeverria at [amywe@columban.org](mailto:amywe@columban.org).





## **Theology of the Universe as God**

*By Fr. Brain Vale, GC*

In these strange days I have been reading and reflecting about the theology of the Universe as God's body (metaphor). God delights in God's creation all around us but at the moment large areas of God's body have the corona virus and are sick. Our God is transcendent but also immanent and so God is holding this suffering Universe within God's self. Our triune God is suffering in this too.

Here in Kowloon I have been keeping mostly within the boundaries of our small property for exercise. I noticed on my walks a small bush in our GC garden here which has tiny white flowers and their nectar is attracting the local bee community and the occasional small bird. It seems the bees are healthy and do not need to practice social distancing although I have not followed them back to their beehive to check on them. It is a delight to see that they are continuing with their bee life and I am sure God is enjoying their work as much as I have enjoyed watching them.

With all the massive unemployment, social disruption and restrictions on our movements caused by the pandemic most of us are experiencing a strong sense of powerlessness. The Easter ceremonies accentuated these

feelings for me as I followed Jesus during Holy Week. We passed through days of waiting after the Passion and have been through the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus but there is still more waiting to pass through before moving out into a different life. Many of us are experiencing a different sense of powerlessness. It is as though we are living in a liminal phase, a space which encourages growth but we are not there yet.....

Some good people are helping us with advice online on how to cope with the grief we are experiencing in these days of tension, isolation and loss. We will have quite a deal more grieving to do. There may be a sense of "cosmic grief" as the whole universe is affected by a virus which seems to have originated from humans improperly containing animals in "wet markets". The local bees seem to be coping well but what of the broader Universe? What kind of prayer and liturgy will we need to express these relationships as we come through this liminal phase? Social harmony has been tested in many communities and in the political world some leaders are not leading well. Cross cultural communication is our charism to be shared and we can rebuild the relationships of trust with people of other faiths and cultures as well as heal our relationships with the natural world.

It is claimed that the Manuka honey from bees in my home country have healing properties so the bees I chat with in our garden are reminding me that there is also a lot of recovery and healing going on in the world. Our Healer God is alive in the health care people and in those researching for a vaccine for the corona virus. There is a strong sense of communal gratitude for the generosity and concern of so many people, especially the frontline health workers.

Where else is the infinite creativity of the Triune God emerging as we move beyond the suffering toward transformation, liberation, and new life? Hopefully some of it is in our renewed efforts to change our lifestyles and reduce our reliance on fuels which are damaging our environment. Everything is interconnected. I am relating to the Universe/Nature in new ways and I am aware that global warming/climate change is the major concern for the future. ■



## Jubilee for the Earth

*By Ellen Teague, UK*

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis' groundbreaking encyclical, is five years old this month. It's a time to celebrate the beginnings of "ecological conversion" in our lives and Churches. We've seen such initiatives as a growth in Livesimply parishes and schools, the planting of trees to celebrate sacramental occasions, and advocacy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

But, how relevant is Laudato Si' Week 16-24 May in the context of the coronavirus pandemic? We have seen the October Biodiversity conference in China and the November climate conference in Scotland postponed. The Climate Coalition Lenten vigil for the climate at Westminster had to go virtual after lockdown. Yet, the new quietness has revealed that the birds sing beautifully, the resurgent Spring blossoms lift the human spirit, and that Earth can heal.

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic prompts greater appreciation of God's creation; and also a deeper understanding of global links that should help us address the on-going public health threats of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. We understand better how any emergency, such as the expanding range and spread of vector-borne diseases like malaria or dengue, or the increasing frequency and strength of extreme weather events, hit the most vulnerable and poorest the hardest. But they hit us too.

Nature is sending us a message with the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis, according to the UN's environment chief, Inger Andersen. Destructive practices - such as logging, mining, industrial farming - which drive wildlife into contact with people must be reviewed. Live animal markets - an ideal mixing bowl for disease - must end. She highlighted other environmental impacts in 2020, such as the huge Australian bushfires and the worst ever locust invasion in West Africa. "The financial and social support packages to maintain and

eventually resuscitate the global economy post-pandemic should therefore promote health, equity, and environmental protection” Anderson said; “we must transition to a more resilient, zero-carbon, just and healthier future, and resources must be directed this way”. She reflected that, “the virus reminds us, by oppressing us for a short time, of those in this world whose whole life is spent in oppression”.

‘Jubilee for the Earth’ is the theme of Autumn’s Season of Creation. And a ‘Creation Sunday’ in September will be introduced. Let us note that high biodiversity reduces the risk of animal-vectorised diseases in human populations, yet three-quarters of the earth’s land surface and 66% of the marine is significantly altered by human activity, habitats are destroyed and degraded, and one million species are at risk of extinction. A Jubilee will mean strangleholds of debt and poverty being lifted, and the planet being delivered from human-induced environmental disasters.

Hopefully, the pandemic has taught us to see security in a new way. For decades, experts have warned of the risks of global threats that are simply too big for one country to handle, such as disease pandemics, climate change, and nuclear war. The response of our political leaders has fallen short. Spending priorities and modes of thinking about security have been defined in military terms.

In early April, Pope Francis and Pax Christi endorsed the United Nations’ call for a global ceasefire. “The threats we face as a planet, health pandemics and climate change among them, demand a coordinated international response with no room for continuing to waste resources on armed conflict,” said Pax Christi.

We have also learnt that global challenges require systemic changes by government, the corporate world, and individual behaviour. We have seen over recent weeks that governments can take radical action and that we can change our behaviour quickly. This crisis is teaching the world much about the values of compassion

and fairness, and the ability of societies to care for the most vulnerable as the basis of security. We have been heartened by the strengthening of community bonds across the nation.

We have learnt that prevention is better than cure. It’s cheaper and safer to prevent people from catching and spreading a virus than to treat huge numbers of cases at once. With climate change, it is better to prevent runaway temperature rises than to figure out how to deal with the consequences.

Our amazing planet is in peril from climate change and the loss of habitats and species. And yet this moment of eclipse, where darkness is passing in front of our normally ordered lives, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stop, and to say that real, lasting change is possible. We have stopped for a virus. Let’s use this time to think hard about what we want the world to look like when we come out the other side.

We must recognise climate instability and biodiversity loss as crises and tackle them with the same conviction as demonstrated during the pandemic. We must learn basic lessons about cooperating with each other, about listening to experts, and about the role that governments can play when they put their minds to it. ‘Jubilee for the Earth’ is a timely theme for the Season of Creation - 1 September to 4 October. Bishop Marc Stenger of Troyes, Co-President of Pax Christi, said last month: *Laudato Si’* “is a monumental gift which could become more and more our Charter in the post-coronavirus era”.

This appeared in the Summer edition of *Vocation for Justice*, which focused on [\*Laudato Si’\* Week and the Season of Creation.](#) ■







## **The Call of Cicadas**

*By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala, Myanmar*

A young girl and her mother went to the riverbank looking for wild vegetables and leaves. The girl and her mother thought that the river split somewhere above and then come to meet again so that they would form an island. After taking their lunch. They decided to split - the mother went to the side of Mali Hka and the daughter went to the Nmai Hka side.

They walked and walked into the forest looking for fresh wild vegetables. Soon it became dark but still they could not find where the rivers meet again. Soon they became scared and got worried. The young girl called out for her mother, "Nu e, Nu e, Nu e!" (Mother, mother!) But her mother could not hear her. The mother also called out for her daughter, "Sha e! Sha e! (Daughter, daughter). But the daughter did not hear her. They could not find the way back to where they started. They soon got tired and fell asleep. Days and nights went by in this way.

After days of searching, without real food and proper sleep both mother and daughter fell down and died. Then they magically turned into cicadas or hkra. During summer, along the Mali Hka river to this day you can hear the calls, "Sha e, sha e." And along the Nmai Hka river you can hear them calling "Nu e, nu e."

The cicadas call out to each other from the top of high trees.

I came upon this story while studying the Kachin language. I asked one Kachin student about them. He said that locally they are called hkra and as a young boy they used to catch and play with them. In the summer months (March-May), they appeared in large numbers and create so much noise at night. But recently, he lamented and wondered that he does not hear or see them as commonly as before.

The cicadas are not the only creatures disappearing in Myanmar. Many other insects and animals are slowly vanishing some possibly not yet even discovered by scientists. Myanmar is home to 331 endangered species, according to the latest research by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), including birds, orangutans, elephants, deer, freshwater turtles, pangolins and tigers. Habitat loss due to deforestation and wildlife trade are leading [factors of biodiversity loss](#).

On one of my trips with my friend Shwebo, a Buddhist monk we visited a Buddhist monastery within a natural forest reserve for wild deers - the Eld's deer (*Rucervis eldii*) also known as the golden deer. The monks are very involved in the conservation of the deers which numbers to about 40 individuals

in Shein Makkar Sanctuary. According to IUCN, the deer is endangered due to intense hunting – for its meat as “medicine,” and as trophies (because of its antlers). The [Eld’s deer is extinct](#) in China, Thailand and Vietnam.

On our way back to Mandalay, we took the local boat through the majestic Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River. We sat on the roof of the passenger boat, as I was mesmerized by images of the quaint villages and beautiful landscape of the riverbanks, Shwebo called my attention, “Kurt look... La bien, La bien!” Sadly I only saw the dorsal fin of what could be a river dolphin. IUCN reports that the Irrawaddy dolphins are already critically endangered and close to extinction. They are not directly hunted or caught but they are caught accidentally as by-catch. Habitat loss and degradation are also major threats to this species.

The northernmost state of Myanmar, Kachin is also rich in biodiversity. In the sleepy town of Lungsha Yang, we were walking on the road just outside the parish church when a large animal came out of the bushes. The elephant with its mahout riding on top lazily walked on the main highway. I was so amazed at the sight. I have never seen an elephant outside it’s enclosure. Early last year in Tanai, the people of Awng Lawt village had to leave their homes to escape the fighting between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese Army. The mahouts and their elephants came to the rescue of sick, young and elderly villagers helping them cross a chest-deep river in Myanmar’s remote Kachin state.

Many elephants worked in the timber industry around the country. Elephants are revered like the deer in Buddhist tradition. The sein hka (elephant dance) is a special tradition where

two individuals dress-up like the elephant and perform the dance. A huge festival is held every year during the Burmese lunar month of Thadingyut (October) celebrating the elephants.

The two rivers of Mali Hka and Nmai Hka meets at one point called the Mali Zup confluence which is the subject of the story above is now threatened by a Chinese-funded dam project already postponed but still hangs over the whole area of the confluence. But it has already displaced many families. The project will not only affect the immediate area but since the confluence is the start of the Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River, down south the Irrawaddy dolphins, too will be impacted by any large development projects up north. Everything is interconnected.



*Endangered animals sold at a market*

It is not all bad news. In 2011, the Government of the Union of Myanmar developed and adopted a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), as part of its commitment as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD ). There is now an increasing awareness about biodiversity conservation in the country. About ten

years ago conservationists in the northern Kachin state mountains discovered a new primate: the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey. But illegal wildlife trading, logging, and forest destruction linked to hydropower schemes already threatened to wipe the species out. This discovery prompted the plan to make this region a protected area. Recently, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation has designated the region as the Imawbum National Park. The protected area covers 386,176 acres in Hsawlaw and Chipwi townships, and is also home to [other threatened species](#) such as red panda, Asiatic black bear, and takin, a goat-antelope hybrid.

But sadly hunting of wild life continues driven by the illegal wildlife trade across the Chinese borders. Many also practice blast-fishing where a dynamite is prepared, lit and thrown into a small pond or the river. The blast does not discriminate and kills all creatures in the water including fingerlings, frogs and others.

To the local Kachin peoples, the forest is like a big supermarket - it is the source of everything from timber, bamboo and thatch for house building, wild meat (frogs, fish, bush animals) and wild vegetables (mushrooms, bamboo shoots, herbs and medicinal plants). The biodiversity of the forest is the food source of the people. Recently, the conversion of many forested areas into mono-crop plantations like banana plantations is also a major factor to biodiversity loss. Without biodiversity, local people also lose their local food source. When plantations take over these areas, sometimes a pond or stream is found within, restricting access to another food-source. Mono-cropping's negative environmental impacts include pollution and decreased water-table levels affecting communities near these plantations. But another challenge is many locals are now also involved in banana plantation and extractive mining activities.

Cicadas existed even during the time of dinosaurs as shown by fossilized cicadas in amber stones discovered in one mining field. But now the call of the cicadas have been silenced by the sounds of chainsaws and gunshots, air bombs and cries of women and children displaced by the on-going conflicts. Often times these conflicts are driven by greed for natural resources like timber, minerals and precious stones (rubies, jade, amber).

But they are just insects. Why should we care?

It is important to remember that insects are "pests" only because in some fashion they interfere with human values or interests. To one degree or another, all species that live in forest systems play important ecological roles. The cicada is no exception. For example cicadas comprise an important prey species for birds and mammals, and the burrowing activity of cicada nymphs facilitates water movement within the soil.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si* that "it is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential "resources" to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves." Their value lies in their creation by God and that we do not have

the right to cause their extinction and take away their ability to live their purpose and give glory to God, simply by their existence. (LS Paragraph 33.)

Myanmar's biodiversity is a reflection of the diversity of it's 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.

Next summer I look forward to hearing the call of the cicadas, "Nu e, nu e... sha e, sha e!" ■

**"Myanmar's biodiversity is a reflection of the diversity of it's peoples. And their lives are intertwined and interconnected. "**

*-Fr. Kurt Zion Pala*





## Scavengers in Our Own Land

By Peter Sut Ring, Myanmar

The Kachin State is located in the northernmost region of the country Myanmar -covered with natural resources and thousands of mountains. Every morning begins with waking up to the chirping of birds and to sounds of a variety of creatures. Kachin land is for me the most beautiful place in the world.

The land is not only known for its natural beauty and diversity of plants and animals but it is more known of its minerals and precious stones or gems like jade, amber, copper, platinum and gold. But among them jade is the most popular stone or gem to people. This story begins in HpaKant. Jade has been Myanmar's key export for many years. The jade which is extracted from the area has the best quality in the world. But with its popularity with jade comes its notoriety of tragedies like deaths from landslides, drug addiction, unfair labor practices and deceits.

Let's take a look! Living and working in the mining camps is a lot of struggle and back-breaking work. Many of us freelance mi (small-scale independent) miners locally called "yemase," which means scavengers who search for possible jade fragments left-overs by large mining companies in the open mines. Most of these "yemasas" live from hand-to-mouth existence.

People discriminate and despise the "yemasas" because they are considered to be all drug-users, thieves and bad elements. It has now been a month since I arrived with my friends to do freelance jade mining. We look for precious stones coming out of the steep slopes of the open pits created and dumped by the mining company trucks. Each one armed with a 'sei

tiu" or small hammer mounted on a stick taps the rocks listening for a certain sound that indicates precious jade is inside the stone.

We cannot go into the pits or the piles of stones any time of the day. But most of the company areas are guarded and restricted. The sound of a whistle signals to everyone that the gates are open and everyone rush to the area where left-over or scrap stones are dumped by the mining companies. The yemasas work hard hoping by luck of finding the stone that will make him rich but constantly facing danger and doing back-breaking work.

As I tap on every rock, trying to listen to the sound of a jade inside a stone, I also have to look out for falling stones and even for fellow miners. We work in areas prone to landslides. Deadly accidents are regular occurrence. These mining areas are high-risk for injuries and fatale damages especially night mining.



Young people working in the mines

Some miners including me prefer working at night to avoid huge crowds and quarreling among other yemasas once a jade is found. There is no real agreement between the yemasas and the companies. If a yemase finds a valuable jade, the company would buy it out for less the amount if one sells it outside of the companies. But if we only get small stones - we can carry them in our bags without being discovered. However bigger stones would catch the eyes of companies and force us to sell at lower prices even if value of stone is very high. If we don't give in, they would take away our stone and we get nothing.

There is no legal protection for small-scale miners or yemasas. So that if we have problems with the mining companies, we can be sued neglecting our rights. If we get injured as a



result of failures by the companies, we do not get compensation. Yemases have no life insurances. Many miners have died in a number of landslides. The death toll is unaccounted. And even with all these risks - people continue to come and strike their luck of finding jade.

Why do people keep coming to HpaKant especially young people?

Many workers from different parts of Myanmar arrive in Hpakant to find employment and income. Many of them are drifters. The longest - running internal armed conflict in the world (between Kachin Independent Army and the Burmese Army) is also making so many young people unemployed. And for those who could not continue studying, the easiest place to find employment or income is Hpakant. Prohibited drugs are also sold and bought easily. Making drugs cheap and many young people are addicted. It is easy to lose one's dignity and self-respect in Hpakant. The place used to be the land of prohibited drugs. Now as a result of continuous awareness promotion against drug use in the communities, it is now not as bad as before.

Many young people believe that Hpakant can change their lives. Just finding one high-quality jade stone can change their lives and lift them out of their poverty and struggles. But being a yemase is not easy. And yet the number of yemases among young people is increasing.

Jade mining have many negative impacts to the environment specially on the land. The land around Hpakant has been altered in the many years it has been mined. Mountains become deep pools and pits. And flats lands have become mountains of scrapped rubbles and stones. The flow of water has already been altered. Water tables also are drying up. Forest lands were converted into mining areas - pushing out and killing the local population of a variety of animals and plants. Arrival of miners from every part of the country has also led to increased pollution and waste generation - year after year. But only the rich get richer and

the poor increase in number.

I believe it is about time to look after and care for our environment and every creature. Time to take care of our true treasure - our Kachin land. Existing environmental laws should be implemented to protect our ecosystems. And laws should also be crafted to protect the small miners, the yemases. To recover the land and forest lost, companies should be required and forced to plant trees.

Should jade mining be stopped? That is the biggest question. If jade mining is stopped, where will the "yemases" go?

Yemase literally means "do not wash the jade" in Burmese the national language of the country. The yemases sell raw jade or unwashed jade to buyers. The buyers determine the price and so they are at the mercy of the buyers. Don't wash your jade unless you want to see how red it is with the blood of yemases who lost their lives trying to find that stone that would change their lives. Don't wash your jade unless you want to see how red it is with the blood of an entire ecosystem lost to the conversion of entire forestlands to make way for jade mining.

*Peter Sut Ring is a local Kachin (Jinghpaw) youth and a 4th year university student taking up Mechanical Engineering. He is also an active member of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM), a university student movement. The movement is inspired by the Student Catholic Action of the Philippines. In the Diocese of Myitkyina it hopes to provide activities and formation programs for Catholic university students. Like many of the young people in the diocese, Peter went to Hpakant with some friends to spend his summer break to be a "yemase" and earn some income while on school holidays. He wrote this piece while mining jade in Hpakant. ▪*

## Environmental Crisis in Pakistan

By Fr. Liam O'Callaghan, Pakistan

When one thinks of the many problems facing Pakistan, environmental concerns are not at the top of the list, but based on my experience and research, they are very high on that list. The recently released Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index 2020, has Pakistan listed as the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change in the period 1999-2018, though at less than 1%, Pakistan has one of the lowest greenhouse gas emissions in the world.

The rapidly increasing environmental crisis cannot get the attention it needs, in the face of so many other crises facing the country: - sixth highest population in the world at 210 million; at least four decades dealing with religious extremism and its fall-out; massive debt - \$18 billion current a/c deficit and external debt of \$105 billion (those figures are from before the Covid-19 crisis!), this has led to 13 bail-outs from the IMF since 1988, the most recent being \$6 b. last year.

However, the Germanwatch report starkly warns that the environmental crisis must be understood in the light of the devastating consequences on the economic, social, health situation of people and the country in general as well as the shocking rapid destruction of the natural world in Pakistan. According to the report, during that 20 year period, Pakistan experienced 152 extreme weather events - floods, heatwaves, snowfall, air pollution etc. - leading directly to the deaths of 9,989 people. The economic loss is estimated at \$3.8 billion - loss of property, livestock, the cost of clean-up and repair after weather disaster, health

care costs etc. And, as Pope Francis reminds us often, the effects are hardest on the poor.

This is the hard reality facing Pakistan today and our missionary work must address this if it is to be relevant at all; this also is the message of *Laudato Si'*, five years old this month, and the deep inspiration for our environmental work here. This is the first encyclical to specifically focus on the environment, but it is even more than that, as it links environmental concerns with issues of social justice and economic equality. With *Laudato Si'*, care for creation is now firmly established as one of the cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). It is not just

addressed to the church only, "I wish to address every person living on the planet...and enter into a dialogue with all people about our common home" (LS 3); this is a powerful impetus to work with people of other faiths on this crucial issue, which we are doing.

Across the diocese of Hyderabad over four years, we have held many seminars and workshops in schools and community groups. We have put emphasis on celebrating Season

of Creation, by producing liturgical resources and practical suggestions for parish action. Each year, we are training environmental activists in three schools and two community groups; we have named them Mahool Dost (Friends of the Earth). The idea is to work in more depth with people, so that they will in turn become active in their communities and become agents of change in their families and wider community. We journey with 50 students and three teachers in each school, and both of the 25-member community groups for a year, with training sessions on the current

**"The Covid-19 pandemic has paralysed life at a global level in a short period, and made us realise the interconnectedness and fragility of the world we live in. The next disaster looming on the horizon is climate change, and the impact on the poor, like now, will be disproportionately high. "**

*-Fr. Liam O'Callaghan*

environmental issues and creating together practical events such as community seminars, tree plantation, celebrating international environmental days.

One of the main challenges facing us is the difficulty in convincing others of the importance of this crisis and trying to deal with it. As we saw above, there are so many other pressing issues and often the connection is not made that environmental issues are often the root cause of many problems. The Church is very slow to focus on this issue, despite *Laudato Si'* and we often struggle to get church people and parishes to focus on it. Likewise, the Government, is failing to implement and properly fund existing policies. Lack of treatment of industrial, household and agricultural waste, means much of the water supply of the country is unsafe to drink, leading to estimates of 80% of all illnesses being due to this.

The government in 2018 announced a 'Billion tree tsunami' which is a plan to plant a billion trees in the country; this is a huge need as tree cover of 1.9% is the lowest in Asia and one of the worst in the world. Lack of tree cover makes the issues of heatwaves, drought, and air pollution much worse. How successful this plan will be is unknown, but it is on-going and at the end of April the Government announced that thousands of workers, who became unemployed because of the Coronavirus lockdown, would be hired to plant trees as part of this plan. This is to be welcomed and hopefully can be expanded.

The Covid-19 pandemic has paralysed life at a global level in a short period, and made us realise the interconnectedness and fragility of the world we live in. The next disaster looming on the horizon is climate change, and the impact on the poor, like now, will be disproportionately high. The UN Secretary General said that the parallel threat of Covid-19 and climate change requires 'brave, visionary and collaborative leadership'. Climate change experts of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) argue this is

a crucial moment to tackle the climate crisis head-on, as well as the pandemic; they argue that dealing with both together requires us to urgently address underlying vulnerabilities - poverty, limited social safety nets, weak health systems and structural gender inequalities. Crucially, they argue the measures should have an explicit focus on the poor and marginalized. Let us hope so. ■





## **Working Towards Ecological Awareness in China**

*By Fr. Dan Troy, China*

In October 2014 the CMU facilitated a visit to Hong Kong by John Feehan, a geologist and botanist who runs workshops to encourage personal encounter with the natural world as a way for participants to deepen their understanding and appreciation of nature, a process which also deepens the participants' understanding of God the Creator. Three years later one of those early participants facilitated a similar workshop by John at her contemplative monastery near Yushe, Shanxi province. 25 Chinese sisters took part in the second workshop. Upon completion of that workshop, an invitation was made by the umbrella organisation of sisters congregations in the north of China for John to give 40 of them a workshop in October 2018. An important development over the course of the three workshops was that the methodology of the workshop was receiving a high level of approval among the participants and that this was gradually attracting the interest of the leadership teams in the north of China where the Church has its strongest presence.

At each workshop John gave interesting classroom presentations about the

development of the universe over vast expanses of time, a development that included the gradual formation of the Earth and the emergence of life on our unique planet. The 14 billion year unfolding process is what has led to where we are today, our Earth being a place where life has found ways to express itself in as many as 10 millions species, vast number of which of which have not even yet been identified. Scientific development of the past 500 years has allowed the human race to move from believing that the world was flat to now being able to look into the depths of molecular life and the distant depths of the universe in the ongoing search for a deeper understanding of the world we inhabit.

Invariably the participants in these workshops experience an awakening to wonder when they look through a microscope to see the beauty of life at a dimension that was previously beyond their vision, a beauty that surrounds us in a multitude of life forms but rarely receives our attention.

In the awakening to this new appreciation of beauty and mystery in the natural world, John Feehan repeatedly asks the question that he sees as crucial for all people of faith, "what does this tell us about God?" This question needs to be asked when we see that there is such mesmerizing beauty in how a spider



weaves its web and how a small flower attracts its specific pollinator or when we consider the the laws of physics that hold the universe in balance as it expands with increasing speed in a way that still baffles the people who study its unfolding.

An enquiring approach to understand the natural world can be seen as a way to probe the meaning behind the text in the book of Genesis where we read that God created the heavens and the earth, the trees and the flowers, the fish in the sea and creatures that walk on land. Personal encounter with the natural world brings us closer to what God has created and therefore provides an opportunity to have a renewed relationship with the Creator.

The publication of *Laudato Si* provides a unique opportunity to encourage the Church in China to pay attention to the importance of what Pope Francis encourages all people of goodwill to do in preserving the beauty of the natural world, our common home. The unraveling of the natural world due to the loss of biodiversity is a serious threat to the future of all life on Earth, the extinction of two species per hour being an eternal loss, the consequences of which we cannot even possibly predict.

In September 2019 two Chinese sisters, one Chinese priest and I worked together to facilitate a five-day ecology workshop using the methods learned from John Feehan. One year earlier one of these sisters took part in the 10-week ecology course run by the Dominican Sisters in Ireland. Last year's workshop for 40 sisters saw high levels of participation and an appreciation of the methodology that was being used.

Since the time of last year's workshop another

Chinese sister has completed the 10-week ecology course in Ireland with Columban sponsorship. In recent weeks the CMU has introduced two of the Chinese facilitators of the 2019 workshop to an online course in which Brian Swimme's book, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* is the basis for 5 sessions of input and group discussion. Two CMU members are also taking this online course on the Deeptime Network website.

In China the government is acutely aware of the importance of environmental protection even though it gives intense priority to rapid economic expansion. However, policies of recent years express government support for projects that promote environmental awareness and education. There is a possibility that this will eventually provide space for the Church and other faith groups to make a greater contribution in environmental awareness and protection in China. If this were to happen, it could also create the space for genuine inter-faith initiatives.

While JPIC activities in China cannot be undertaken in the same way as happens in other countries, gradually a way is emerging for Columbans to collaborate with Chinese friends to make a contribution in ecological awareness, a case perhaps of life adapting itself to a local environment and finding a way to express itself in a setting that might eventually allow more space for further growth.



*Participants at an ecological workshop*

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## Setting up a Laudato Si' Committee in Melbourn

*By Fr. Peter O'Neill, Australia*

On January 30th, three of us from the Melbourne Laudato Si Animators Group met with Theresa Rhynehart, Mission Director for the Archdiocese of Melbourne to present the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for our proposed Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Laudato Si Committee. The Committee will offer co-ordinated guidance with the Archdiocese for the ongoing proclamation, formation and implementation of Laudato Si. Theresa is supportive of the idea and has presented the TOR to Archbishop Comensoli. We are waiting for his response. We are now having our monthly meetings via zoom.

Ajesh Abraham created two videos on the environment: one on the [anniversary of Laudato Si'](#) and one about the [Columban's work on climate change](#). ▀



## Celebrating Laudato Si' Week in Fiji

*By Marjorie Engocy, Fiji*

For this year's LS Week, I collaborated with our IRD coordinator, Ms. Priscilla Magdalin. We organized a youth program inviting the youth representatives from the different faith communities around here in Suva. Because of the restrictions--no social gathering of more than 20 people--we decided to run the program through zoom gathering. The objective of the program is to "empower and activate the youths of Fiji to care and protect our common home." We had our first session with Fr. Kurt Pala last Saturday, 16th May. You will be able to find his session on the Columban Fiji FB page ([Session 1-LS Week 2020](#)). We just finished the second session last night with Miss Iemaima Va'ai, a Samoan youth working with the Pacific Council of Churches. She is in charge of the Youth and Climate Change desk at present. I am currently editing the recording of her presentation last night. Finally, we will have our last session tomorrow where we will try to see what programs or activities we can put into action for Season of Creation in September. Priscilla and I are hoping that this freshly established youth network for both IRD and JPIC will continue and grow as we try and work together.

On the parish level, Christ the King Parish-Ba also organized a "ginger planting", Holy Family Parish-Labasa decided to do individual vegetable planting, and St Pius X Parish-Raiwaqa, Sema Livelihood Program members did clean up the parish front garden and continued developing their vegetable garden, encouraging family prayer and strengthening of family relationship. Everyone is also encouraged to join the worldwide day of prayer this Sunday at 12:00 noon. ▀



# Celebrating Laudato Si' Week in Myanmar

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala, Myanmar

Members of GCCM- Myanmar facilitated its first online eco-reflections from May 17-23, 2020. The daily eco-reflections were lifted from Fr. Manny Bautista's Living Laudato Si: The Ecological Challenge of Pope Francis. The eco-reflection begins with a reading from Laudato Si followed by a short reflection and eco-actions. Space is also given for participants to share their own reflections. Then everyone recites and takes the Laudato Si Pledge and a short prayer. Facilitators also used different songs and videos in their presentations.

The themes for these reflections include the following: Interconnectedness of Creation, Ecological Sin, Cry of the Earth - Cry of the Poor, Ecological Conversion, Healing our Common Home, Young People and Creation, and Eco-education in the Family. Everyday during the week of eco-reflections - it drew 15-20 participants including new members. The participants found the sessions important to connect with people specially at these times when everyone is quarantined at their homes. One member is currently in Rome while the rest are mostly based in Yangon, Myanmar. With the ongoing crisis, online meetings like Zoom has allowed individuals even communities to reach out and to learn that even in quarantine we are still connected. For many of the members this is their first time to use Zoom as a platform for online meetings.

Everything is interconnected (LS 240). The eco-reflections hopefully will lead to regular online meetings allowing connection and support moving into what can be considered "Laudato Si Circles" - a method promoted by GCCM

International. Social Media or socmed in this new norm is now the way to make connections and relationships which is important in continuing advocacy work for Laudato Si.

At a webinar on "Integral Ecology and Digital Culture with USIG: International Union of Superiors General, Fr. Amado Picardal, CSSR who is the executive co-secretary of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation: A Joint Commission of the USG and USIG: International Union of Superior Generals in Rome presented about "Promoting Integral Ecology through Social Media." He pointed out that social media can be used as a means to promote integral ecology, make each one aware that we are



Putting Laudato Si' into action

interconnected, let each one hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, enable each other to go through the process of conversion and to move us to act together to address the ecologically crisis locally or globally. He gave the example of the social media called Facebook where one can create personal accounts, pages or group accounts. He emphasized that using social media like creating facebook groups helps create virtual communities or movement

of common interests and goals. Under group facebook account he showed the example of the GCCM-Myanmar.

Because of government quarantine rules due to the pandemic, public gatherings including religious celebrations were banned. The Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) together with the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission through Radio Veritas Asia - Kachin (RVA-Kachin) produced online daily eco-reflections based on the same format of the GCCM - Myanmar program. But they were all recorded in the local language. Bishop Francis Daw Tang also recorded a message inviting everyone to celebrate Laudato Si Week



online and to make the Laudato Si Pledge as our commitment to caring for our common home. Facilitators for the daily eco-reflections included two religious sisters, catechist, priest, lady executive director of KMSS, Catholic student movement's president and a local director of a community school who is also a family-man. Radio Veritas-Asia (Kachin) used to broadcast on short-wave radio but has now move to using Facebook to broadcast its contents. Through their facebook account (<https://web.facebook.com/RVAKachin/>), our daily reflections and the message of Bishop Francis were able to reach as many as 7,000 views. The videos are uploaded everyday at 8:00 in the evening during the entire week. The last session was given to planning out actions for the coming months as this year is a special 5th year anniversary of the publication of the encyclical, "Laudato Si."

Recording and editing from home the youth and student leaders were also able to produce a short video to promote Laudato Si and invite young people to join and stand for their future. It is made in Burmese language (with English subtitles) which is the official language of Myanmar. It is posted on the RVA-Myanmar Service facebook account and now has 3,200 views. The video is also posted on the English website of Radio Veritas Asia (<https://www.rvasia.org/laudato-si-week-16-24-may-2020>).



## **Educating Young People to Care for Creation in Peru**

*By Mariella Martinez Rengifo, Peru*

The Perseverance Group is a group led by adolescents and young people from the Virgen del Rosario Chapel whose objective is that children, adolescents and young people strengthen their skills and abilities, in their family and community environment, to develop actions in favor of well-being and development community. For which they have developed a community action "Plantaton" that seeks to sensitize the community of Urb. Virgen del Rosario, about the importance of caring for the environment, developing strategies for the recovery of the Usteriz and Riveros Park, where activities aimed at the creation of green areas and their beautification are being developed, with the support of the community and the Columban Mission Centre.

Fr. Kevin Mc Donagh is parish priest in Samanco in the Diocese of Chimbote. He is heavily involved with JPIC issues at diocesan level and in his parish and is a member of the Social Justice Commission of the Diocese, presently coordinating the work. He also participates in the "Delegation Social" which is the Social Pastoral arm of the Diocese.

Each year there is a "Semana Social", a week of workshops on social issues, 3 evenings in the capital Chimbote and a night each in the northern, central and southern parts of the Diocese. Themes covered were: The Synod concerning the Amazon, National issues such as the Elections and the Rights of Women particularly femicide.

Each year there are activities linked to Ecology spread out throughout the Diocese. On "Earth Day", which was hosted by Kevin in Samanco, around 400 young people came together, with the theme of "Taking Care of our Common House", with street procession, symbolically picking up rubbish as they went, and finally on the beach a liturgy with quotes from the Bible and the Synod, followed by song, theatre



and dance reflecting the life of Peru: coast, mountains and jungle.

In Chimbote, "Water Day" was celebrated, with a Stations of the Cross through the most contaminated areas of the capital. Kevin is also involved in celebrating liturgies in the prison and supports the health pastoral work. Kevin also made available a secondary school religious education text book, that mainstreams ecology, for the 25 secondary schools in his deanery.

## Using Radio to Care for Creation

Sí, da Vida is a civil association in Lima and Callao. One of its priorities is the care of the environment. It is one of themes that we have been promoting from our virtual radio "ConeXionvida". Over the last 5 years, programs have been produced and broadcast aimed at promoting good customs on the care of our planet and demonstrating civil society initiatives that are related to the fight against climate change.

Among the programs that have been broadcasting we have:

**Bosque Tierra:** Program in audio-visual format that seeks to raise awareness in relation to climate change, care for nature and respect for the jungle territories.

**Integral Territory:** Radio ConeXion Vida, in partnership with the Peru Solidarity Forum, currently produces the micro program "Integral Territory", radio spots of about 10 minutes each, that inform and raise awareness on the issues of the care of the earth and nature as well as promote respect for the Andean-Amazonian communities.

**Fruits of the Earth:** "Frutos De La Tierra" is the name given to the radial micro-programs (around five minutes each) that seek to contribute to the improvement of food security and the promotion of ecological producer organizations in the rural areas of Peru (Ucayali,

Huánuco and Lima). One of the activities to achieve the objective of the Frutos de la Tierra (Fruits of the Earth) project is carried out in partnership with Anpe-Peru.

They are produced by "Radio Connection Life" and broadcast radially throughout the Andean and Pan Amazonian regions and beyond, through the radio network of the Latin American Association for Radio Education (ALER).

**Manguaré:** "Manguare" is the name of the radial micro news dispatches (around five minutes each), which, issued weekly, maintain a constant flow of radio communications on the Pan Amazonian territory and the "care for nature" agenda.

They were produced by the alliance between Radio Connection Life and the Pan Amazonian Social Forum (FOSPA).

They are available on the SoundCloud platform of Radio ConeXion Vida and were broadcast throughout the Andean and pan Amazonian regions and beyond, through the radio network of the Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education (ALER) and others associated with the Pan Amazonian Social Forum (FOSPA) system). ▪



## **“Nurturing”ecologicalConversion”**

*By James Trewby, UK*

Some of the best days I've had working with young people have been in a community garden - touching worms, planting things and chasing chickens. It's messy, simple and joyful. I get to witness the gentle unfurling love a young person has for creation. Amongst the muddy fingers and the giggles in the fresh air, there is a humble appreciation of nature tenderly arising.

In moments like this there are tiny beginnings of 'ecological conversion'. It is important for us to do what we can to facilitate opportunities like this, where young people can encounter nature, rather than just having a mediated experience in the virtual world. Over the past couple of years we have been running eco-retreats at St. Columban's in Solihull with school groups. Through collaboration with Ger Clarke, from the Irish Columban Region, we have developed a day for children which draws upon *Laudato Si'* and is topped and tailed by prayer and reflection. The retreat gives children a chance to explore creation in a hands-on way, through activities such as bark rubbing, a scavenger hunt, pond dipping (meeting newts!) and sketching. A highlight for the older children has been using our new electronic microscope - seeing the stings on a nettle and the grime on their own fingers provoked quite a reaction!

“Nature is filled with words of love” (LS #225), and as young people fall in love with creation, this love spills out into action.

### **Faith and action**

“Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.”  
-*Laudato Si'* #13

Over the years I've attended many climate change marches and protests, and these

protests can become powerful formative experiences for other young people to come along and catch fire. It has been my great privilege to lead retreat days for young people that include taking part in climate strikes. A day in Birmingham included joining the youth climate strike and a powerful online conversation with an activist in the Philippines. A student said afterwards:

“When we interviewed Joanna Sustento on our trip to Birmingham it made the effects of climate change seem so real and drove home that the effects of climate change are happening now and we must act. Joanna's story, her bravery, her drive is so powerful that out of something so tragic she is able to fight for change.” - Aoife

I feel encouraged to give young people opportunities to fall in love with creation and creator, to create space for their voices to be listened to, and to march with them for the good of our common home.

### **‘Tackling our Throwaway Culture’**

We've just come to the end of our third 'Columban Young Journalists' Competition' on the theme, 'Tackling our Throwaway Culture'. We received incredibly insightful work from young people. For example, Kit Bell, the 2020 competition winner from All Saints Catholic School in Sheffield, wrote:

“When asked for his opinion on the matter, Pope Francis offered a unique take: that our careless attitude toward things we no longer need has spread past material possessions. The way we treat those on the edge of our society is all the proof we need to see that he is right - the elderly, left to fade into an undignified end; those with disabilities, left to struggle until they can no longer cope; the homeless, left to scavenge for our cast-offs, as if we can offer nothing else. The invisibility of those we have no use for shows how much the consumer mindset has poisoned our humanity. We simply throw away people we think we don't need, whilst keeping those who promote

this toxic ideal.” Kit ends her piece saying: “Indifference and selfishness are the only true drivers of this throwaway culture – so maybe it’s time for a change of heart.”

The young people asked themselves how they can make changes. Maureen Onwunali of St Paul’s in Milton Keynes submitted a powerful spoken-word poem for the competition which touched upon changing shopping habits: “Ordering next day delivery for a one day event... that fast fashion with fading fabric filling your closet with trends, that textile waste tailored to your taste”.

See our winning articles at: <https://columbans.co.uk/category/justice-peace/education>

See our four winning videos at: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC5w6L2-bOVQfo\\_D7\\_cHn6p1f\\_1IMJecs](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC5w6L2-bOVQfo_D7_cHn6p1f_1IMJecs).



## Deep Journey into Laudato Si’

By John Din, Philippines

JPIC Philippines’ main focus for the last three years has been to support GCCM-Pilipinas (founded in 2015) in promoting *Laudato Si’*.

During last year and the beginning of this year, we have conducted trainings of “Deep Journey into Laudato Si’” in the different dioceses where Columbans are working. The training was also conducted to other religious congregations, CSO’s, and NGOs in Luzon Visayas, and Mindanao.

“Deep Journey into Laudato Si’” is a modification of the Pachamama Alliance’s “Awakening the Dreamer Changing the Dream” symposium, which was launched in 2005 with the purpose of bringing forth and environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on this planet. GCCM-Pilipinas modified the module by contextualizing it to Philippine reality and integrating the message of *Laudato Si’*.

The module is experiential where participants are guided into four important questions:

1. Where are we?
2. How did we get here?
3. What is possible now?
4. Where do we go from here?

I was particularly surprised how this module has responded to the desire of people to grasp the complex and yet interconnected issues of ecological crisis, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment. Feedback from participants has been that this module is the new framework for situational analysis and recovers the role of spirituality as source of hope and inspiration in responding to the current climate emergency.

Since 2018 thousands of people in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao have experienced the symposium. Up to recently, we have trained around 600 animators to give the “Deep Journey into Laudato Si’” symposium to their

networks. The symposiums has been given to dioceses, civil society organizations, and NGOs around the Philippines. We are receiving more requests for symposia and trainings. Training was also conducted in Myanmar and twice in Thailand.

Inspired by *Laudato Si'* and the CBCP pastoral letter, CBCP NASSA, the social arm of the Conference of Bishops in the Philippines, has initiated an eco-convergence project where the "Deep Journey into Laudato Si" is an integral part of its educational component. The module is now translated and dubbed into three languages thanks to the support and effort of Columban Missionaries. ▪







## Urging a “Green” Recovery for COVID-19

By Rebecca Eastwood, USA

The Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach co-wrote the following letter sent to the Congress of the United States. The letter addresses the urgent need for a “green” response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 100 Catholic and interfaith organizations signed the letter.

*“True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good.” (Pope Francis, Laudato Si’, #178)*

Dear Member of Congress:

We are Catholic religious orders and organizations from around the United States who write to you grounded in our faith’s call to preserve the dignity of each person, prioritize the needs of people who are poor and vulnerable, and care for God’s creation.

While the coronavirus has made all of us vulnerable to illness and financial setbacks, we know that low-income communities and communities of color face greater risks due to already existing health and economic

disparities. We therefore thank you for passing legislation during the upward curve of the pandemic that not only protects our heroic healthcare workers but also provides crucial relief for millions of us and our neighbors who have lost jobs and income.

We see, however, that some communities are still bearing a larger burden from the pandemic and the economic fallout, and we urge you to ease these impacts in future relief packages. Specifically we call for:

- Healthcare resources to be directed to African-American and Latino communities and tribal nations historically and currently harmed by air and water pollution that puts residents at higher risk for respiratory illnesses
- A nationwide moratorium on shut-offs of water, electricity and heat to ensure that low-income households aren’t left more susceptible to the coronavirus due to lack of access to such basic necessities
- Increased funding for energy efficiency programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) that benefit low-income households.

While these immediate needs are uppermost in our minds, we also are looking ahead toward getting people back to work and building a more resilient and healthy society once the worst of the health crisis has passed. We are compelled to seek a sustainable recovery that reduces risks to communities disproportionately vulnerable to health crises and economic disruption and that addresses the looming global climate crisis that similarly threatens lives and livelihoods.

As we look ahead, our priorities include:

- Investments in clean energy industries such as solar and wind through mechanisms like clean energy tax credits. Studies have shown that these industries are more labor-intensive and create more jobs than do the fossil fuel industries.
- Job training for the clean energy economy of the future, especially creating such opportunities for workers transitioning out of fossil fuel industries and for low-income communities
- Investments in public transportation to ensure workers access to new job opportunities while reducing pollution and helping to mitigate climate change
- Investments in infrastructure to ensure that everyone living in the United States has access to clean water. During the COVID-19 pandemic we see how many vulnerable communities are put at greater risk of infection because they can not engage in recommended hygiene practices.
- Increasing air pollution standards and oversight, especially for mercury and other toxic metals, and upholding environmental impact studies as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. This is necessary to reduce pollution that puts residents of many communities, too often low-income communities of color, at greater risk for viruses like COVID-19.
- Redirecting some of the excessive US

military budget to foreign assistance supporting public health, humanitarian programs, disaster preparedness and response, and sustainable infrastructure in developing countries. Boosting security at home now clearly means reducing as much as possible the threats of future global pandemics and the global climate crisis.

The coronavirus has exposed both the weaknesses and strengths of our infrastructure and support systems. Far too many people and communities, left behind in the best of times, are becoming disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 and the economic fall-out. Yet we also see a willingness to make individual and collective sacrifices for the common good, and the capacity for governments at all levels to allocate in a short period of time the resources needed to address a global crisis.

In upcoming legislation we urge you to protect those most harmed during the current pandemic while also ensuring that persons who have been shown to be most vulnerable to illness and job losses benefit during the recovery. This also is an important moment to prepare for the next crisis and increase resilience for everyone, regardless of race, class, income and zip code. ▪





## Report on Columban IRD Network

*By Fr. Liam O'Callaghan, Pakistan*

The Columban IRD Network was constituted in 2014 by the General Council (GC) following a meeting of those involved in IRD in Lahore; the IRD Network consists of those Columbans actively engaged in inter-religious dialogue. In the Plan of Action which came from the meeting, it states that 'the role of this Network is one of mutual support and raising the profile of IRD in the Society and among our co-workers, benefactors and supporters.

In early 2020, the IRD Network decided to update the 2014 Plan of Action, and having a number of drafting processes, produced the Columban IRD Network Strategic Plan and a Plan of Action for 2020. The role of the Network was specified as:

- to provide mutual support for each other in this challenging and often isolated apostolate,
- to raise the profile of IRD in the Society and among our co-workers, benefactors and supporters,
- to strengthen collaboration between IRD and JPIC,
- to promote IRD in the churches where we work.

The IRD Network has three focus areas, one of which is collaboration with JPIC, which attempts to work on pressing JPIC issues by harnessing the collective wisdom and energies of the various religions and indigenous faith traditions. Within the Society, the Network will attempt to provide IRD contact persons for JPIC personnel, join in joint JPIC/IRD conference calls, providing information and contacts of interfaith partners for JPIC ministries such as migration, environmental issues, human rights etc.

In our multi-religious and multi-cultural world, it is crucial that our JPIC and IRD ministries work in greater collaboration to provide effective responses to the complex issues facing us today. ▪





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[Fr. Kurt Pala](#) (JPIC and IRD)

## Oceania Region

[Fr. Peter O'Neill](#), *Australia*

[Marjorie Engocy](#) (CLM), *Fiji*

[Fr. Tom Rouse](#), *New Zealand*

## Pakistan

[Fr. Liam O'Callaghan](#) (JPIC and IRD)

## Philippines

[John Din](#) (CLM)

## South America Region

[Adriana Curaqueo](#), *Chile*

[Mariella Martínez Rengifo](#), *Peru*

## Taiwan

[Fr. Taaremon Matauea](#)

## United States

[Scott Wright](#)

[Rebecca Eastwood](#)

[Wesley Cocozello](#)