

International JPIC Newsletter

Volume 5

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Missionary Society of St. Columban



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In Our Hearts, Homes, & Habitats

By Amy Woolam Echeverria, Co-Editor

Peace be with you! As this special season of Resurrection continues to unfold, may we be renewed in our faith and belief that love, justice, and peace will prevail.

This issue of the Society JPIC Newsletter is dedicated to stories, news, art, and resources that shed light on what is happening in the Society and beyond to celebrate and participate in the ongoing work of bringing *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* to life.

There is great anticipation of the upcoming opening of the *Laudato Si'* Decade and the global *Laudato Si'* Action Platform (LSAP) which will have a soft unveiling during LS Week, May 16-24 and the full launch on October 4 at the conclusion of the Season of Creation. The LSAP is organized by 7 sectors and by 7 goals (see page 5). In various ways we have been part of the

design and roll-out of this process.

Our Columban response to the LSAP is to convene an international group called the Columban Creation Covenant Working Group. We began meeting in March and are availing of the Appreciative Inquiry process to discern the Society's engagement in the *Laudato Si'* Decade. The first stage of our process is to connect with our own experiences as a group and later in the year we will introduce steps for RMUs for their discernment. We are holding together *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* as three sources of inspiration and guidance.

As I reflect on these Society and global processes of the Church, I remember the proposal made by Sean McDonagh many years ago, even before *Laudato Si'*, and that is that the Church engage in a global synod on care for the earth. While we are not calling the LSAP a synod, it certainly has characteristics of the dream we've put forth for many

years. Pope Francis has placed a culture of care and synodality at the heart of his pontificate and the LSAP is yet another sign of that vision in practice and I am heartened to say that Columbans are leading voice at every level.

Please receive my good wishes and gratitude as we open this urgently needed decade for bringing *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* to life in our hearts, homes, and habitats.



We will have a “2050-Future”?

By Wesley Coccozello, Co-Editor

In the spring of 2018, the regions of the Americas held an Encuentro that adopted an “option for young people living in the periphery,” especially within the context of *Laudato Si'*. This commitment was made in light of the “Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment” and more generally the growing global call from young people to be included in the decision making of the Church and other powerful institutions.

The Encuentro challenged us to “form and accompany ... young people in the Columban charism as disciples of Jesus who live the mission of building the Reign of God with other young people.” It recognized that in order for this work to succeed, “young people [must] share friends ... and feel they have a space that is uniquely theirs and not someone else’s.”

But as the Synod has faded into our memory, I want to be mindful that our commitment doesn’t too. As the Columban Creation Covenant Working Group begins discerning the Society’s response to the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, how does our commitment to young people shape this process and the decisions that will come out of it?

Scientists and politicians tell us that 2050 is the deadline by which our societies must be fossil fuel free and sustainable, and it is young people who will have to face the consequences of

our collective climate inaction or action in 2050. That's why it was affirming for me to see that there are a number of young Columbans on the working group, including seminarians. They ought to have a seat at the table as their future is planned out.

Here in the United States, the Catholic Climate Covenant (Columbans are members of its steering committee) have started a youth and youth adult mobilization task force, which I was invited to be a part of. This task force is made up of young people committed to cultivating within our peers their ecological vocation. Our work is to water the seeds of the Gospel already planted within their hearts and equip them with the tools to help heal and liberate oppressed peoples and the planet.

As I think about how important it is to invite young people into mission with us, I remember a conversation I had with a mentor of mine who does research on why young people disaffiliate from the Church. He said to me that there are two questions young people ask themselves when evaluating a faith community: "Am I invited? Are my friends invited?"

Are we inviting young people and their friends to carry on the Columban mission? Are we inviting them to help us make decisions? If not, they'll never show up.



Changes to the JPIC Newsletter

At the end of last year, we asked our readers to send us their feedback on the JPIC newsletter via a survey. We are grateful to everyone who filled it out and helped us make the newsletter more responsive to your needs.

In this issue, we are implementing a number of changes. The biggest one is that issues of the newsletter will no longer be organized by issue area (for example, climate change or migration). Instead, will we publish a variety of content to better reflect the variety of work happening within the Society.

At the same time, we recognize that throughout the year there are certain big moments that shape all our work and so each issue will have a section devoted to one of these major events. In this issue we will be highlighting the Laudato Si Action Platform.

Finally, we want to ensure that there are a diversity of voices within the newsletter, so please email us your submissions! More information on how to do this (and deadlines for future issues) is on the next page.

Thank you!

-Amy & Wesley

Upcoming Newsletters and Submission Deadlines

Release Month	Theme	Deadline
August	UN CBD 15 and COP26	July 9
December	Preparing for World Day of Prayer for Peace and Interfaith Harmony Week	November 12
February 2022	TBD	January, 2022

Please email your submissions to Amy Woolam Echeverria at amywe@columban.org.

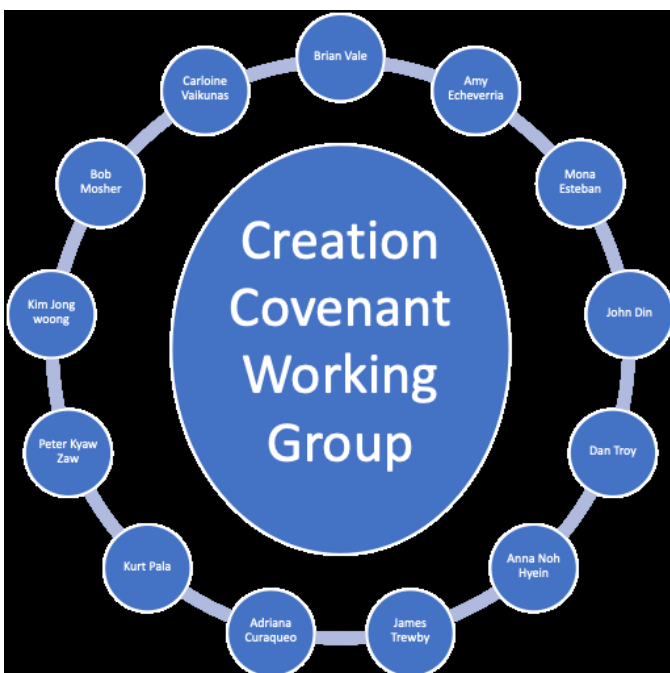
Upcoming JPIC Days of Prayer & Action

- **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



Laudato Si' Action Platform at a Glance

Laudato Si Action Platform Goals



Laudato Si Action Platform Sectors



Laudato Si' Action Platform

Acting on Laudato Si': What is the Laudato Si' Action Platform?

By Sr. Kate Midgley, SSC (UK)

On the 24 May the Vatican will invite the entire Catholic Church to embark on an audacious faith-filled, decade-long journey through the Laudato Si Action Platform. The Vatican hopes that as many of us as possible will join this journey together and that with every passing year the number of us on this journey will increase exponentially.

So why is the Vatican so concerned that we all take part in this journey?

Pope Francis, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and David Attenborough (to name a few household names) as well countless scientists, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens have all warned us that we need to take urgent action in order to protect our Earth from a sixth mass extinction and dangerous global overheating. Changing weather patterns could spiral out of control, making large parts of the earth uninhabitable and leading to hundreds of millions of climate refugees.

As Christians we believe that the whole Earth is a miracle of God's creation and that it is held in every moment by God. This attitude of awe and wonder was

evident in the title Pope Francis gave to his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (or, Praised be). The title recalls St. Francis of Assisi who, "just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he [would] burst into song" (LS no. 11).

The Pope, quoting St. Francis, spoke with great tenderness about the Earth: "Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us" (LS no. 1).

Now, six years after *Laudato Si'* was first published, the Pope, through the Vatican Dicastery of Human Development, is inviting us to act now and embark on this journey through the Laudato Si Action Platform. Pope Francis has said, 'let us dream' and the Platform is a visible

form of that dream.

You can watch an excellent [twenty minute video](#) on what the platform is all about, featuring Fr Josh Kureethadam, the head of the ecology desk at the Dicastery.

The platform is inviting different sectors of the Church to embark on this journey toward sustainability and integral ecology. The Vatican hopes that members from each of these sectors will

"We know from history that radical social change starts from below ... Everyone is needed for this journey, as Greta Thunberg has said: 'somebody needs to do something and I am somebody.'"

-Sr. Kate Midgley

make public commitments to the seven Laudato Si' goals (see the sectors and goals on page 6).

We know from history that radical social change starts from below where its Gandhi in India, Mandela in South Africa, or the Suffragettes across the world. Everyone is needed for this journey, as Greta Thunberg has said: "somebody needs to do something and I am somebody."

"What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn." (LS no. 160)

Sr. Kate Midgley is a Columban Sister who did the Global Catholic Climate Movement's "excellent" Laudato Si Animators course last year. She is a member of the GCCM UK Animators' group and is starting a Laudato Si parish community gardening group in East London.



Philippines Bishops Launch National Laudato Si' Program

By John Din (Philippines)

On March 3, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) launched the National Laudato Si' Program (NLSP). The program was developed by a joint effort of the different commissions of CBCP together with the Global Catholic Climate Movement Pilipinas. NLSP aims to strengthen the church's strategic response to care for our common home. This is the contribution of the Philippine church to the seven-year Laudato Si' Program promoted by the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The NLSP, spearheaded by the CBCP/ National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice, and Peace (NASSA - the social arm of the Catholic church in the Philippines) is the concrete response to the CBCP Pastoral Letter in 2019, which calls for Ecological Conversion in the midst of Climate Emergency.

The 2021 Global Climate Risk Index showed that the Philippines ranked 4th in the list of countries most affected by climate risks. Just last year, at least five strong typhoons hit the country causing tremendous devastation amounting to "90 billion pesos output losses, or an equivalent to a reduction to the full-year GDP by 0.15 percent, according to NEDA" (manilastandard.net, March 5, 2021).

In his message about the NLSP, Most Rev. Romulo Valles, DD, CBCP President

said, "I am here not only as head of the CBCP, but also as a bishop who has experienced the local scenarios of the global environmental problem that Laudato Si' has pointed out to us. This situation is a global concern [and] thus calls for a global response."

The NLSP is composed of six components:

- Education and Formation
- Liturgy and Worship
- Research and Database
- Specific Advocacies for 2021
- Strengthening Partnership
- Developing the Organization

It is expected that for this year 2021, a diocesan ecology desk will be created in dioceses which don't have it yet, and those dioceses that have an existing ecology desk will be strengthened. The creation of ecology desks is long overdue. It was already called out in the CBCP Pastoral Letter in 1988 and affirmed by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991.

Columban Missionaries in the Philippines welcome this timely initiative in the context of climate emergency. Columbans' engagement with GCCM-Pilipinas is part of the regional plan's commitment to care for the poor and the exploited earth.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made physical activities impossible, yet it has opened an enormous possibility for online activities. In 2020, in spite of Covid-19 restrictions, GCCM-Pilipinas

was able to mobilize a network of more than 60 organizations (church, civil societies and NGOs), including the different CBCP commissions to organize online events during Laudato Si' Week, Season of Creation, and Advent! Issues about human rights, rights of the indigenous people, loss of biodiversity, extractive industries, red-tagging of human rights and environmental defenders, the current economic model of development, aggression, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and gender issues were all brought to the fore.

It was great to see the beauty and pains of our world now finding their place in our liturgies and celebrations. This clarion call was already echoed in the CBCP Pastoral letter in 1988, which our very own Fr. Sean McDonagh played a major role in its writing.

With the CBCP National Laudato Si' Program, GCCM-Pilipinas and its partners are inspired and motivated to continue the efforts of bringing Laudato Si' to life.



MEDIA RELEASE
Columban Missionaries launch
Biodiversity Podcast
(EMBARGOED UNTIL 22 May 2021)

HONG KONG. To celebrate World Biodiversity Day on 22 May, Columban Missionaries have released the **Columban Biodiversity Podcast: Jubilee for the Earth.** The study guide and embedded video links can be downloaded from the website of the [Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#) in Washington.

The podcast is also a Columban contribution to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* Decade which launches on 24 May. We are committed to the principles of *Laudato Si'* as central to our ongoing "ecological conversion". We have joined the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform as a participating organization as well as an organization that has developed the Platform. Our missionary experience has taught us that all creation forms one earth community. All are necessary and important. We need an economic and social order that collaborates mutually with the whole of God's creation as well as a spirituality of care and relationship.

To guide this commitment, an international Columban committee has been established called the Columban Creation Covenant Working Group. We are a diverse group of men and women, lay and ordained, including members from Pakistan, Myanmar, Philippines, USA, Chile, Taiwan, Fiji, Australia, Britain, Korea, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Ireland, and China. This Columban

Creation Covenant Working Group will provide guidance and accompaniment to Columbans throughout the world as we plan action towards 2030.

We are committed to engaging actively in the upcoming United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Kunming, China, and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK. We see these two processes as interrelated opportunities for policy advocacy as well as grassroots education and action. We join with our international partners - including the Vatican Dicastery for Promotion of Integral Human Development, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), Union of Superiors General (USG), Union of International Superiors General (UISG), and national and local partners to have a robust voice calling for the care and protection of all life on the planet. We endorse GCCM's COP15 Biodiversity petition.

We pray for and thank Pope Francis for his ecclesial leadership and pastoral vision which invites inclusive dialogue among peoples of all religions and those of good will. We offer our ongoing active support to bringing his encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* to life.

Rev. Tim Mulroy
Superior General, Columban
Missionaries



International Earth Day "Restore our Earth"

By Sr. Caroline Vaitkunas (Australia)

International Earth Day is a global event celebrated annually on April 22nd. The first-ever Earth Day took place in the USA in 1970 to raise awareness about environmental issues and now includes the participation of more than 1 billion people in 190 countries. The theme this year is 'Restore our Earth.' There are many ways to focus our efforts each day on restoring Earth by standing up for climate action, taking steps to end plastic pollution, supporting species restoration and improving our awareness about environmental issues. Whilst taking practical action to care for our Earthly home is vital, as people of faith, we are called to go deeper.

Columban Fr Michael Gormly says:

'Ecological conversion is not just feeling good in the natural world. Nor is it about recycling and the

odd adjustment to our lifestyle... This is about conversion. It involves a change in consciousness about how we relate to ourselves, our world and our God.'

As I reflected on these words, I recalled a day when, as a Year 10 secondary school student, I rode out on my bike with my Dad's camera to take photos for a Geography project on pollution. I chose to focus on a suburban creek close to my home.

As kids, we rode along tracks near this creek very often, but it was only when I looked more intently that I became aware of the incredible amount of rubbish that had either been disposed of in the creek or washed in from nearby streets. I remembered being shocked that the creek itself had been violated. The seeds of this early awareness that creation has dignity and rights has continued to grow in me over the years.

As I ponder this year's Earth Day theme, 'Restore our Earth,' I am drawn to the word restore, synonyms for which are renew, revitalize and 'bring back.' The Earth Day theme then suggests that whilst we are engaged in hands-on action to care for Earth, we are invited to have a change of heart and mind and recognize and value how intimately we are interdependent with all creation.

First Nations Peoples around the world articulate deep awareness of belonging to Country. Sherry Balcombe; Leader at Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria, says:

"We want to share our deep spiritual connection with the Land and all parts of it. It is just as sacred to us today as it has been since time immemorial.

This is our true gift to the world. When you become still and listen carefully, you can hear the song lines that connect us, and you can feel our ancestors calling in the wind."

What a wonderful gift. As we journey with this invitation, it is also imperative that we continue to commit ourselves

to ongoing education about injustice, acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples unceded Sovereignty of Country. Sherry says:

"There is a deep wound in the country, and until we address it, it will continue to fester."

First Nations have elected the First Peoples Assembly to represent the voice of Aboriginal communities across Victoria, the first state to progress towards a Treaty. Recognizing wrongs in the process of truth-telling and addressing ongoing injustice is an essential parallel to healing and the work of establishing Treaty. (PDF attached)

Issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation run clearly throughout Pope Francis Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*:

"Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."
#91

A further message to reflect on for International Earth Day comes from the

"As I ponder this year's Earth Day theme, 'Restore our Earth,' I am drawn to the word restore, synonyms for which are renew, revitalize and 'bring back.' The Earth Day theme then suggests that whilst we are engaged in hands-on action to care for Earth, we are invited to have a change of heart and mind and recognize and value how intimately we are interdependent with all creation."

-Sr. Caroline Vaitkunas

'Making Peace with Nature; A scientific blueprint to tackle climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies.' In words that echo values in Catholic Social teaching about the common good, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres states:

'An inclusive world at peace with nature can ensure that people enjoy better health and the full respect of their human rights so they can live with dignity on a healthy planet... we have the ability to transform our impact on the world. A sustainable economy driven by renewable energy and nature-based solutions will create new jobs, cleaner infrastructure and a resilient future.'

The world is called to a radical shift to ensure this safe future, and we know it. News items and documentaries about the consequences of humanities' over-reach on Earth's resources are available for everyday viewers through media outlets at increasing rates.

Easter & Beyond

Throughout this season of Easter, we continue to be nourished by the origins of our Christian hope. In the reading for the 4th Sunday of Easter, Jesus says: 'I am the good shepherd; I know my own, and my own know me.' John 10: 14-15.

Easter is a time for us to have renewed confidence that we are God's people and that the fruits of our relationship with God, who continually guides us towards the good, will support the steps we take

towards peace, justice and healing for all.

How can you bring the spirit of Easter into your relationship with the earth? What can you do in the spirit of International Earth Day?

- Take some time outdoors, move slowly and take notice. What do you see, hear, feel? Breathe in deep.
- Who are the Traditional Custodians of Country where you live? Find out where to join an Aboriginal walking tour to learn more about the world's oldest, continuous living culture.
- Offer some inter-cessory prayers in your parish.

Sr. Caroline Vaitkunas RSM is a member of the Peace, Ecology and Justice team in Australia.





Jubilee for the Earth: A New Study Guide

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis writes that “each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. 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 no. 33).

The Pope’s encyclical reminds Catholics and all people of goodwill of something that many of us have forgotten about: that caring for our brother and sister species is fundamental to our lives as people of faith and as global citizens.

And yet, in 2019, an international group of scientists predicted that up to one million plant and animal species face extinction due to human activities. This

mass extinction has already started, and it will be more severe and longer lasting than any previous mass extinction event.

That’s why the Missionary Society of St. Columban created “Jubilee for the Earth,” a podcast mini-series about the beauty of biodiversity and the threats it faces.

Biodiversity is the stunning variety of life on Earth. This variety exists at the genetic level, the species level, and the ecosystem level. The complex interactions between these levels have made Earth habitable for billions of years. The study of biodiversity has shown that every member of creation is interconnected.

Over the course of six episodes, we explore the spirituality of biodiversity, how our economic system is the root cause of biodiversity loss, and so much more. You can learn more about the podcast [here](#).

You can listen to the podcast on Apple, Spotify, or SoundCloud, or watch them as videos on Facebook or YouTube.

This [study guide](#) is a companion to the podcast and can be used by an individual or a group. It includes three reflection questions and one activity for each episode.

If you choose to use this study guide in a group setting, we suggest listening to or watching the episode before you meet, so you'll have more time to discuss it with one another. Each episode is only 20 minutes long.

You may also want to set aside some time at the beginning of each meeting to talk about your experiences completing the activity from the previous week.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Rumours of a COP

By Danny Sweeney (Scotland)

In the summer of 2019, we first heard rumors that the next COP (Conference of Parties Climate Conference) would be hosted in the UK. The assumption that this would be held in London, or perhaps Manchester or Birmingham, had myself and colleagues in the Church of Scotland outlining ideas for pilgrimage. We knew groups had gone to Paris in 2015 from around the world. We envisioned starting at Iona or Whithorn and taking the spirits of Columba and Ninian down to England to show our concerns for creation.

Then it turned out that it was Glasgow who would be welcoming the world for COP26. We would be hosts, not guests!

Churches need to be in dialogue over something this significant! We are now a group of around 30, representing both Glasgow churches and the national Church agencies. We meet regularly to share information, plans, and discern together just what may be needed to make a success of hosting a COP. One fruit we're reaping from this dialogue already has been using the common ground of our concerns to grow our membership wider than the established ecumenical networks and bodies. To welcome the world to Glasgow would not be an "either/or," but a "both/and" for the church as a whole, our shared work complementing and feeding the plans we were making in our own traditions.

At the start we had many ideas, lots of hopes, and even more concerns as to just how we could not only “do” this, but do it well. It must be said that these early meetings were defined by what we did not know. Both the Holy See and the World Council of Churches are signatories to the COP.

Would we be expected to host delegates? Did the Vatican have a specific agenda for us? With delegates from around the world presumably containing within their number Christians of varied traditions and languages, were we expected to cover all these bases ourselves, or be gracious hosts in facilitating others? Should initiatives take place in churches across the city, or were we expected to provide a chaplaincy to the UN-controlled zone that would be established on the south bank of the Clyde?

But for all the answers we didn't have, we had ideas: ways which we could witness to our concerns, to share the prophetic vision of *Laudato Si'*, and show a proper Scottish welcome to the world.

Within a few months the rumours moved on. After the Chile COP moved to Madrid and failed to deliver on the hope that was placed on it, Glasgow became

very significant. It's been five years since the landmark Paris Agreement, and the increasing imperatives to make real change.

Sadly, other rumours abounded too. The Westminster government was refusing to speak to Holyrood, the First Minister of Scotland was being refused accreditation as a UK delegate, the Scottish government had reserved all the buildings nearest to where COP will take place with no interest in sharing

them. Already, all the hope we were pinning on the COP seemed to be overshadowed by political wrangling. As we started to find our feet, new rumours started - a new highly contagious virus was being detected in Wuhan.

As we continued to make plans very quickly the talk turned to lockdowns

and furloughs, and I along with several others found ourselves furloughed and unable to continue planning. During lockdown COP wasn't top of most people's agenda, but rumours still circulated. Would it be moved to London, or cancelled, pushed back for six months, and then to 2021?

We're now planning for COP in November of this year. But what does a COP look like in a post-pandemic

“Can we take as genuine the promises of a government which places Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace on terrorist watchlists for schools? Which serves the interests of those who are after unlimited growth from the finite resources of the planet?”

-Danny Sweeney

Glasgow? Not just the COP itself, which is unlikely to have thousands of delegates as in previous years, but our dreams and plans for mass gatherings, marches through the city, and public worship all feel like they are on uncertain ground? There is an unspoken fear of another COVID wave forcing us to alter or cancel everything. Like so many in this last year we have had to learn to use online platforms to meet. The possibility to bring the world to Glasgow, be it online, or in person certainly remains. We're just waiting to see which one it will be.

Most challenging to our hopes have been rumours about whether the government is truly committed to what is needed to take on the climate crisis. We have met with civil servants involved with the COP team in the Cabinet Office. We are constantly reassured that the government values the voice and the presence of the Churches at this event. We have had to make it clear that a government which in a matter of months has slashed international aid, broken commitments to nuclear disarmament, is passing legislation which targets traveller communities, is curtailing our rights to protest, and effectively criminalises seeking asylum does not get to "faith-wash" what it is doing around the COP.

At a time when leadership is desperately needed from the government it seems they are more concerned with appearance than with outcomes. We feel it is cynical for oil companies to have sponsored events or buildings

at COPs in the past. The government cannot claim our allegiance when they are ignoring the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, which Laudato Si' speaks directly to.

Can we take as genuine the promises of a government which places Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace on terrorist watchlists for schools? Which serves the interests of those who are after unlimited growth from the finite resources of the planet? Glasgow will certainly be written into the history of the world's response to the climate crisis later this year.

Danny is the Coordinator of Justice and Peace Scotland, and represents the Bishops' Conference of Scotland on the Glasgow Churches Together COP26 Co-ordinating Group. He is an alumni of the Columban Invitation to Mission programme, which included a learning visit to Pakistan. You can visit the website for Justice and Peace Scotland here.



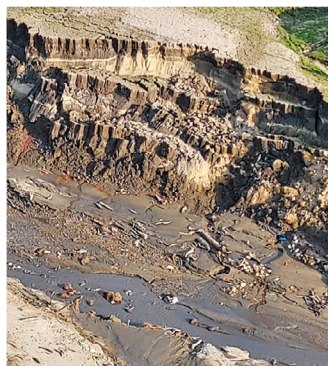
"Big Lake" is running dry for the first time ever

By Taaremon Teatao, SSC (Taiwan)

Even before Pope Francis released his encyclical on climate change and our common home, titled *Laudato Si'*, many parts of the world were already experiencing the extreme effects of climate change. Being from the South Pacific, I'm aware of the detrimental effects of the rising sea levels in low-lying atoll islands, like Kiribati and Tuvalu. Here in Taiwan, while other parts of the world are experiencing floods due to excessive rainfall, we are starting to experience the serious effects of drought.



Since local governments started rationing water, there has been an increase of consciousness among the locals about what *Laudato Si'* says about the effects of climate change. For example, in the mountains where the Columbans serve Aboriginal communities, two villages are experiencing water shortages. Parishioners in a nearby town called DaHu, which means 'big lake,' have said that for centuries the lake has never run out of water, but now the lake is drying up due to climate change.



Many of our parishioners are greatly impacted by this problem. Farmers have shared how the water shortage is affecting the harvests that

they depend on for their livelihood. Everyone is talking about how this problem affects our daily lives and how our understanding of what is "normal" needs to change. We need to be more conscious of conserving water, we have to think about how to use water wisely in our everyday lives. Even when we use water in our toilets or showers, as much as we can we need to be mindful of not wasting water.



When the Columbans first arrived in Taiwan way back in the 1980s, never in the history of the country had we experienced a water shortage. However, this year in 2021, due to severe drought in the central and southern parts of Taiwan, reservoirs throughout these parts of the country have reached dangerously low levels. To address this problem, local governments have announced that water will be rationed on certain days. Every household is being asked to reserve water because there will be no running water every day like there used to be.

Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs

By Fr. Denis Blackledge SJ (Ireland)

Editor's note: This article was originally published in the Far East. The editor's are grateful to Sarah MacDonald for allowing us to republish it here.

Columban missionary Fr Sean McDonagh is renowned for his leadership on climate change and care for the earth. His latest book explores 'Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs'. To give you a sense of its prophetic insights, we are reproducing a review of it by Denis Blackledge SJ.

This is a timely, challenging, stimulating, knowledgeable, and, yes, frightening volume by a well-known author who knows his stuff as an environmental theologian. Moreover, he writes in a style which is crisp and clear, and ends all his eleven chapters with a brief summary conclusion. The book deals with the awesome rise and staggering advance of Artificial Intelligence [AI] over the past four decades or so, and into our present pandemic era. The impact of AI is all-embracing. How it is regulated, and how institutions provide suitable ethical policies to cope with it, are key issues for our present and future generations. And the Catholic Church in

general has not yet wakened up to the vast practical impact of AI, not least on the availability of jobs worldwide.

The author, who was instrumental in helping the Philippine Bishops to write the first-ever ecological pastoral letter, *What is happening to our beautiful land?*, way back in 1988, systematically highlights how AI has speeded up, and how it has impacted on jobs, algorithms, 3D printing, robots and drones, the future of farming, caring for children, the elderly and those with special needs. He clarifies how AI has changed retail, hospitality, banking, finance and call centres. He focuses on self-driven cars and trucks, and how robots are currently used in warfare. All with stark simplicity and clarity.

He concentrates on how to create a UBI, a Universal Basic Income, defined by Sean Ward in 2016 as: "a substantial, unconditional and tax-free payment from the exchequer to all citizens on an individual basis, financed by a flat tax on all income. It would replace tax credits and tax allowances for those in paid employment and welfare payments for those who are not in paid employment".

His final chapter reminds the reader of what Catholic Social Teaching



has to say about work, seen not as a commodity but as crucial and central to an individual's self-worth. Pope St John Paul II and our current Pope Francis have written extensively on the creative value of human work, and on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May 2020, Pope Francis prayed that no-one would be lacking a job and "that all would be paid justly and may enjoy the dignity of work and the beauty of rest". Sadly, with the advance of AI, only 40-50% of workers will have paid employment. So Catholic Social Teaching will need to be revisited and revised. McDonagh believes that "preparing for and responding to the social impacts of AI and automation will be the defining challenge of the next decade, and that the Catholic Church and all religions will need to take this issue on board, as a central pastoral focus of their work at local, national and global level". He reckons that groups should be formed in every parish and diocese to address this issue. And most of the people dealing with this issue will be lay people, not clergy.

If this does not wake you up, goodness knows what will. This is required reading for all those who take their faith seriously, and with adult responsibility. This book needs to be widely available, read, and its contents put into practice and earthed. Otherwise, humanity is in danger of becoming just another digital app.



An Extract: Biases against the Poor, People of Colour and Women

The lack of women in important positions in AI was demonstrated by a survey undertaken by the World Economic Forum and LinkedIn in 2018. It showed that women held only 22 per cent of jobs in the AI workforce. The data also pointed out that women with AI skills are employed in data analytics, research, information management and teaching, whereas men are employed in more lucrative and more powerful roles, such as software engineers or as chief executives. Ivana Bartoletti, a privacy and data-protection professional who chairs the Fabian Women's Network, is adamant that young women must query the outcomes of decisions made by algorithms and that, furthermore, they must demand transparency in all the processes that lead to the creation of algorithms; otherwise she believes women will be sidelined.

Bartoletti points out that women lose out on another front because the jobs that are about to be automated through the use of AI technology affect women more than men. For example, in Britain, 73 per cent of cashiers in shops are women, and 97 per cent of these are expected to lose their jobs to automation. Bartoletti believes that it is time for women, not only to investigate what AI means for them, but also to make sure that, 'in the public discourse, women frame and lead the debate about the governance of AI, so that it becomes a force for the common good and not the ultimate expression of masculine control'.



Peter goes to work for workers

By ACRATH

Editor's note: This article was originally published in the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans newsletter. The editor's are grateful to ACRATH for allowing us to republish it here.

Congratulations to Fr Peter O'Neill following his appointment as ACRATH's representative on the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) Advisory Group. While the position involves meetings and reviewing documents from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), Peter will continue his work on the ground, meeting seasonal workers and finding out what issues concern them.

"I coordinate with ACRATH members who have direct contact with seasonal workers so I know what is happening on the ground and to share relevant information at the teleconferences," Peter

said. He has visited seasonal workers in Regional Victoria and accompanied Sr Janine Bliss (Qld ACRATH Coordinator) to visit seasonal workers in Bundaberg.

Peter, head of the Columbans in Australia, hopes that during his two-year term some progress will be made on some of the challenges facing seasonal workers, including:

- Most seasonal workers are paid piece rate (paid for the amount picked, packed, pruned or made). The challenge is for the government to have regular inspections to ensure the workers are paid a piece rate that enables them to earn no less than the minimum wage, and to ensure their working conditions are safe and hygienic. This year the government has employed 19 Pacific Labour Mobility Officers. Is this number sufficient to cover the whole of Australia?
- Some seasonal workers are choosing to leave their place of

employment due to lack of work and poor work conditions. They are vulnerable to being used by unapproved employers. After one month these workers are no longer covered by health insurance, which makes their situation even more precarious.

- Costs and conditions of accommodation.

Peter is hopeful of progress having served on an earlier iteration of the Advisory Group and contributing to some 'wins' for seasonal workers.

"When COVID hit, our teleconferences were spent discussing the impacts on the seasonal workers. Initially the government gave advice for seasonal workers to apply for a bridging visa when their current subclass 403 SWP visa is expiring. However, with sound advice coming from the unions and welfare and wellbeing representatives, the government took heed and decided that seasonal workers were eligible to apply for a Temporary Activity (subclass 408) - Australian Government Endorsed Event (AGEE) - COVID-19 Pandemic visa".

Sacred People, Sacred Earth A Multi-faith Day of Action for Climate Justice

By Fr. Liam O'Callaghan, SSC

GreenFaith International Network is a global, grassroots multi-faith movement aiming to promote a new era of multi-faith climate action. GreenFaith says that at the heart of the environmental crisis are death-dealing power structures - ineffective or immoral governments, extractive industries, and fundamentalist or extremists religions. This unholy alliance is wreaking climate devastation.

85% of the world's population claim allegiance to one religion/spirituality or another. GreenFaith believes that the faith institutions which represent most of these can and must do more to solve the climate crisis. The world is crying out for change.

The mission statement of GreenFaith affirms that "together our members create communities to transform ourselves, our spiritual institutions, and society to protect the planet and create a compassionate, loving and just world".

For many months, GreenFaith International had been preparing for a massive, grassroots, multi-faith global day of climate action, Sacred People Sacred Earth, which was held on March 11 at 11:00am. The choice of '11' (as in, 11:00am on March 11) is a play on 'the eleventh hour,' trying to capture the urgency of the environmental crisis facing us and the need to act before it is too late. All organizers of events

were asked to agree to the guiding GreenFaith values:

- Rooted in Spirituality
- Moved by Compassion
- Passionate for Justice
- Inclusive by Nature
- Responsible in Practice
- Bold for Good

Over 400 events took place in over 40 countries! The event in Dalgan Park was one of them.

Dalgan Park - Sacred People, Sacred Earth

Our event began with morning Mass in the community chapel, at which about forty Columban missionaries attended, adhering to Covid-19 protocols. The Mass incorporated aspects of the Day of Action's theme as we gave thanks for the gift of creation and prayed for conversion so that we may better care for our common home.

The second part of the Day of Action began when the church bell struck 11:00 am. Thirty-two participants took part in this one-hour activity. They were divided into four groups and in turn attended four workshops, one each on prayer/spirituality, biodiversity, personal/lifestyle conversion, and interfaith cooperation for the environment.

The final part of the Day of Action was a signature campaign addressed to the Minister for the Environment Eamon Ryan and the three Meath East TDs (one of whom is the Justice Minister, Helen

McEntee), urging them to improve the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2020, which is before Irish Parliament at the moment.

Three of the four (including the two ministers) wrote to us very lengthy and detailed replies, outlining their party's commitment to working for improvement to the climate Bill. In fact, the Cabinet approved the revised draft of the Bill on March 23, which environmental activists have broadly welcomed as much improved on the first draft of October 2020.

This is an exciting sign of hope that more leaders in government are beginning to seriously address the climate crisis.

You can learn more about this event [here](#), as well as by watching this excellent four minute [video](#).



Encouraging Catholic educators to challenge everyday militarism

By James Trewby (UK)

Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker, James Trewby, recently teamed up with Aisling Griffin, Schools and Youth Education Officer for Pax Christi, to provide a series of sessions for educators to learn together about Catholic Social Teaching in action.

Hosted on Zoom, the first session was a facilitated encounter with Sr. Katrina from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, a Roman Catholic Religious Order of women in the Diocese of Nottingham. Topics included prayer, vocation and non violent direct action. In another session, Columban Fr. Bob Mosher joined the discussion live from the USA and explored his experience of working in areas of poverty, migration, and human rights with people on the US/Mexico border.

During another session, the group explored the “military ethos” in education and discussed how militarization is impacting young people. This is an area Catholic educators don’t often have the time or opportunity to reflect on, considering how people might challenge everyday militarism in their communities through the eyes of the Gospel.

Talking about the program, Aisling Griffin said that “collaborating with the Columbans to facilitate these sessions has been brilliant. The Columbans have a wealth of experience to draw upon

and share and it’s a privilege to explore issues that are important for educators and people of faith and to be able to support and encourage them in their own formation. As educators we play an important role in guiding young people who are active for social justice and aware of the world around them. It is important that our Catholic educators are equipped to answer difficult questions raised by students on some of the issues we’ve discussed and can give them the tools and understanding to work for peace.”

Linda Walmsley, Lay Chaplain at a secondary school in Lancashire who participated in the sessions said that “I’m so glad I participated on this program; it’s been really worthwhile and beneficial. I’ve been able to deepen my knowledge and understanding in some key areas and I’ve been encouraged to look differently at militarization and the ways in which the armed forces are represented in society and in our schools.”

She adds, “I’m sure many of the topics we covered will be of interest to our school pupils; those who are active in their faith and those whose faith is more nebulous or even non-existent. James and Aisling have given me the courage to look at setting up my own justice and peace group at school which will provide a space where students can foster social action debate and perhaps even take some tentative steps towards nonviolent action for justice and peace.”

Issues regarding justice and peace

and the integrity of creation have been central to Columban mission since 1976. Through education, advocacy and campaigning we inspire to build on our mission experience here and around the world by confronting injustice and conflict in four priority areas; these being migration, environmental justice, economic justice and peace.

[Pax Christi](#) has many years' experience of working for peace and promoting peace education in schools and amongst young people. They work hard to develop solidarity between people who are working non-violently for justice and peace whilst celebrating the life and witness of peacemakers, and they promote an understanding of sustainable security where human needs are met and the environment is protected, rather than seeking security through weapons and warfare.

You can read the Society's statement on peace and demilitarization [here](#).



Snapshots of Environmental Action

By Anna Noh (Korea)



**Climate Busking Team,
Economad (GCCM Korea)**



**Friday Climate Change
Movement (GCCM Korea)**



Anti coal-fired power plants Movement



Cycling & Walking Climate Movement (GCCM Korea)



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