**Religious Congregtions and the Laudato Si’ Action Platform**

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**SLIDE 1 – RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS AND THE *LAUDATO SI’* ACTION PLATFORM**

This webinar is about sharing how far we have gone with our reflection on how Religious communities and Congregations could actively participate in the effort that the whole Catholic Church is planning to complete a transition to Integral Ecology by 2030.

**SLIDE 2 – LIVING *LAUDATO SI’***

Back in 2018 scientists raised yet another alarm: unless by 2030 we reverse the current trends in carbon emissions, the dramatic climate changes we are already experiencing will become irreversible. From there it came a renewed sense of urgency, which suggested the need to speed up the transformation envisaged in Laudato si’.

= That is why this year we are celebrating Laudato si +5 and the special anniversary year for that encyclical letter.

= We are grateful and encouraged by the so many initiatives Religious Institutes have already started to promote integral ecology. But there is also a need to move on together, in communion and forming a critical mass for systemic change.

= As pope Francis stated, “Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan” (LS 164).

**SLIDE 3 – A PARTNERSHIP**

The initial plans for a special anniversary year developed into a much bigger endeavour, under the invitation of pope Francis: a commitment to complete the transition to integral ecology by 2030, involving the whole of the Catholic world.

= The Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development has been tasked with the overall direction of the initiative. Then many partners have been involved, on account of various domains within the Catholic community.

= One of such domains is that of Religious Congregations. UISG and USG are therefore a major partner of the Dicastery, collaborating to facilitate the involvement of Congregations around the world.

Since last February, we have been reflecting on how that could be done practically, namely, what kind of approach could make it easier for Religious communities and Institutes to involve themselves and participate actively.

= Then there is also the Global Catholic Climate Movement, contributing technical support and a digital platform.

= So the question is: how can we facilitate the involvement and participation of religious communities and Congregations?

**SLIDE 4 – CRITERIA FOR A PROPOSAL**

We asked ourselves how a journey of Religious communities towards Integral Ecology could look like, considering all the diversities that distinguish them!

We realised that there cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Communion and unity can happen at the level of a shared, broad process. But then each community needs to define her own journey in detail, according to their charism, situation, context, and so on.

After a wide and frequent consultation with JPIC Promoters, we have come up with **4 criteria** that would characterize a possible initiative involving the Religious in a shared journey:

= **The process should build on what Religious communities are already doing**: not only this means tapping their creativity and existing initiatives, but it is the only realistic way of building a movement for integral ecology.

= **It should be simple and gradual enough to be manageable**: communities are often already overstretched, caught in-between many commitments and limited number of personnel. The process needs not scaring them away from making a commitment.

= **It should be inspiring enough to motivate**: communities need to see in this initiative an opportunity to live their charism and their prophetic mission to the fullest.

= **And flexible enough to suit different situations and contexts**: a process suggests a sense of direction and essential points of reference. For the rest, participants will have all the freedom of the children of God.

**SLIDE 5 – THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS**

**Religious communities at the front of transition**: it is amazing how much Religious communities and Institutes are already contributing to Integral Ecology. Their testimony is definitely a seed of hope and a proclamation of the Reign of God.

**They articulate LS according to their charism**: Religious Institutes in communion with the universal church partake in the struggle to transform the world. The invitation that the Church extends to them to participate in this common journey is a sign of the Spirit for them. When they join the journey, the enrich the church and the world through the gift of their charism. In that sense, each contribution is unique.

**They link local to the global**: that’s another strength of Religious Congregations. They are deeply rooted among the people, they are inserted in local contexts, but at the same they constitute or are part not many organizations have.

**They bridge different realities to form a “people”**: another characteristic of the Religious is that they have the power to convene, to bring together realities that hardly come together. A very precious capacity to build up the unity that is needed to make integral ecology a reality!

**SLIDE 6 – STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSAL**

We could envisage a support system to the commitment of Religious communities based on three elements:

- **A framework of reference**, that is, the *Laudato si’* Action Plan proposed by the Dicastery. This works as an overall frame of reference within which each Congregation and community would situate herself.

- **A process of involvement**, comprising 3 elements (that we are going to see in a moment). This is the actual journey that communities and Congregations would make.

- **And some practical tools** or how-to-do guides, in case communities do not already have their own toolbox or would like to acquire new instruments to support their commitment.

**SLIDE 7 – LAUDATO SI’ ACTION PLATFORM**

This is the overall framework worked out by the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development (DPIHD)

= It will be officially launched on May 24th, 2021

= Participating communities and Institutes, commit themselves to a 7 year journey to complete their transition to Integral Ecology

= However, it is hoped that new communities will join the initiative every year

= In fact, to allow for an exponential growth, the intention is to at least double the number of participants every year

= That would lead to the growth of a Laudato si inspired network of communities

= in order to reach quickly a critical mass for radical transformation. That’ s necessary for systemic change. In fact, social scientists tell us that when 21-25% of a population embraces change, then the social system will change.

**SLIDE 8 – THE LAUDATO SI’ GOALS**

The horizon of such systemic change is defined by 7 Laudato si’ Goals, namely:

= Responding to the cry of the Earth

= Responding to the cry of the Poor

= Ecological Economics

= Adoption of Simple Lifestyles

= Ecological Education

= Ecological Spirituality

= Community Engagement and Participatory Action

**SLIDE 9 – THE PROCESS: 3 COMPONENTS**

The participation to the common effort towards integral ecology could involve 3 components:

- A public commitment

- The work to complete the transition to integral ecology

- And journeying together

**SLIDE 10 – PUBLIC COMMITMENT**

**This has to do with committing your community to complete the transition to Integral Ecology within 7 years**: this could be done through a public statement, like a Manifesto or a Covenant, like various communities have already done. Such a statement would be personalised, but some basic templates could be availed as examples. Typically, the Manifesto could make reference to the 7 LSGs, the mission and charism of the community, the context in which it is inserted, etc.

= **Communicate the commitment to the public**: as public commitment, the Manifesto should be published, for example by posting it at the entrance of the community, or on the community’s website, or in the Newsletter or other communication with the territory.

= **Be accountable to the public**: having made a public declaration, it would be necessary to be accountable for the commitment made. For example, communities could produce a sort of end of the year report communicating to the public their accomplishments and results in their effort towards integral ecology.

= **Celebrate accomplishments**: it is very important to celebrate and give thanks for the life that has emerged or has been regenerated over the reporting period. Prayer, liturgy and celebration are very much part of the process towards integral ecology!

**SLIDE 11 – TRANSITION TO INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**

This is the kernel of the journey of the community. A journey that needs to be measurable, if it is to be truly accountable. Therefore, at the beginning of the journey a community would need to define specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound goals and assess her situation in relation to them.

= Secondly, we could envisage that **the community embeds the plan for her transition into her community project cycle**. All Religious communities have their own way of making a yearly project that involves both commuity living and ministries. We suggest that the plan for the transition to integral ecology be not another, added commitment on top of the ordinary community project. Rather, the ordinary community project could take into consideration yearly targets for making the transition.

= **Evaluate your yearly journey and track your progress against set targets**: as every Religious community evaluates the implementation of her yearly project, she would also keep track of her progress towards integral ecology.

= **Certify your level of accomplishment**: a practical tool for facilitating evidence based assessment of the level of integral ecology attained could be availed. Communities could make use of it to give evidence of their level of accomplishment. Major superiors could also use it to animate communities and support them.

**SLIDE 12 – JOURNEYING TOGETHER**

This aspect of the process is crucial for having social impact and contributing to systemic change. For example, communities can participate in global campaigns for Integral Ecology, such as the divestment from fossil fuels, or banning plastic packaging, and so forth.

= Another precious means of communion could be joining or forming a Constellation for sharing and exchanging experiences related to integral ecology.

= Also, in view of accelerating transformation worldwide, every year a community could invite other communities to join in and form partnerships with them (also North/South partnerships).

= Of course, we shouldn’t forget to link up with the Laudato si’ Action Platform prepared by GCCM

**SLIDE 13 – PROGRESS ON WWEBSITE DESIGN**

GCCM is designing a digital platform based on four components:

- LEARN: a dedicated learning space full of useful resources

- ACT: an opportunity to build an action plan and find out about existing programs

- TRACK: track progress, for example concerning a community’s carbon footprint

- FORUM: available to all users to facilitate sharing and collaboration

**SLIDE 14 – A TOOLBOX**

We are aware that often Religious communities have already devised their own practical toolkits for making their journey toward integral ecology. However, in case some communities were in search for some other possibilities, they could access them from repositories such as that of Sowing Hope for the Planet or that of the Laudato si’ Action Platform. We are also considering designing some specific tools that may result particularly convenient for Religious communities, linking their particular situations to the 7 LSGs.

The idea is to build up a dedicated toolbox. For example there could be a tool for social inclusion, which could specifically take into consideration the cry of the poor, social inclusion, ecological economics, and community engagement. Or, likewise, tools that would focus on the cry of the earth, simple lifestyles, ecological economy, ecological spirituality and participatory action. Or again, a tool considering Ecological education, the cry of the earth, ecological spirituality and the community engagement.

Such tools would be based on the See-Judge-Act method.

**SLIDE 15 – SOCIAL INCLUSION TOOLKIT**

For example, a social inclusion toolkit would include:

- A tool for assessing the situations of social exclusion in the territory where the community is inserted

- A handbook to planning strategies for social inclusion and to setting “SMART” objectives to transform the situation

- A guide to accompany planning, implementation, evaluation and celebration of the results of the ministry of the community

**SLIDE 16 – INTEGRATION STRATEGIES**

For example, the social inclusion toolkit would help a community to identify and make contact with excluded social groups

Then it would present an array of possible strategies and activities for welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating marginalised groups. The idea is that a community does not need to do everything, but may discern among what she could pick up among a varied number of possibilities. But again, that’s just to offer an orientation; communities then remain free to choose or even create their own activities according to their charism, methodology, possibilities etc.

**SLIDE 17 – CARBON FOOTPRINT TOOLKIT**

This is another example, following the same pattern. The toolkit may suggest some good Apps which a community may choose to measure their current carbon footprint. That would give her an idea of the change she needs to operate to become carbon neutral. For that purpose, a handbook would explain all she needs to know about the carbon footprint and what strategies and actions she can put in place to reduce it.

That would lead the community to discern what would make sense in her situation, and then plan, implement, evaluate and celebrate accordingly. Once again, the tool would be very flexible: it is up to the community to decide what she can do and how in her situation and context.

**SLIDE 18 – REDUCING THE CARBON FOOTPRINT**

For example, typically Carbon Footprint Apps categorise information according to the categories of travel, home, food, Goods and Services.

Therefore, the handbook could give suggestions according to those very categories and a community could get some ideas of what she can do from them.

**SLIDE 19 – MAINSTREAMING LAUDATO SI’ TOOLKIT**

Another interesting toolkit would be that to mainstream LS into the ministries that a community has already undertaken.

Actually, education and spirituality do not necessarily require to start new activities and commitments. Just think of the impact of bringing out LS education and spirituality in the ministries and activities that a community is already running!

This toolkit could simply guide communities to do at least that.

**SLIDE 20 – WHAT ARE CONGREGATIONS DOING?**

We do not yet have a map of the work Religious Congregation are already doing, but definitely there is a lot going on!

We share some information, as a way of example, about these 6 realities, because of two reasons:

- They have put in place initiatives at Institute level, while many other Congregations have more localised programs

- The information has been shared with us, so we simply know about them

The **important point**, however, is that while integral ecology starts with the committed action of local communities, it is also important the involvement and support of the Institutional level. In fact, the leadership of Religious Congregations is a crucial actor, who is called to set up and sustain institutional processes to attain an integral ecological conversion.

**SLIDE 21 – CLARETIAN FAMILY**

This comprises 8 Institutes partaking in the Claretian charism

They have planned to start with a survey based on the 7 Laudato si’ Goals. They prepared a questionnaire and sampled respondents.

For each of the 7 LSGs, the questionnaire gathers information about the respondents’ awareness, discernment (from the scientific and faith perspectives), and practical commitments.

The results of the data analysis will be the basis for an overall Plan of transition to Integral Ecology.

**SLIDE 22 – HOLY CROSS FAMILY**

This comprises 4 Institutes partaking the charism of the Holy Cross societies

Already in 2009 they have signed a statement on climate change commitment themselves to work together for:

- care of Creation

- simple lifestyle + carbon neutrality

- ecological sustainability as part of decision making, planning and practices

- ecological economy

- advocacy (policies for environment and the poor)

- interdependence, right relationships, common good

**SLIDE 23 – SISTER OF THE HOLY CROSS**

An example of the fruits of such commitment, is the Carbon Footprint Reduction Fund of the Sisters of the Holy Cross

Yearly allocation for projects:

- decrease dependence of fossil fuels

- increase energy efficiency

- tree-planting and reforestation

In 4 years: they have supported 37 projects and donated over 60,000 USD

**SLIDE 24 – COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES**

They have designed a Columban Creation Covenant. The format involves areas such as:

- Prayer and spirituality

- Continuing education, or life-long learning

- Daily commitments for a greener lifestyle: here they take into consideration key carbon footprint categories, such as transportation, energy use, purchasing habits, food and water.

- And finally advocacy work, for systemic change

In order to put the Covenant into action at local level, they have chosen to focus specifically into 5 areas, particularly meaningful for them, namely:

- spirituality

- formation

- community

- dialogue

- and celebration.

But they are at the same time working at Institute’s level:

- they started by setting up a steering committee

- then they developed a Strategic Plan and allocated a budget for following up its implementation. The Strategic Plan has set specific targets they want to reach.

- And finally they have developed a monitoring tool, an Integral Ecology Index that helps them to define a baseline and track progress

**SLIDE 25 – BROTHERS OF ST. JOHN OF GOD**

They have set up the “Live! Laudato si’” initiative, a 7 year strategic approach to embed ecology into daily living and contemplation (domains: learning, community, culture of hospitality, professional workforce, embracing change and continuous improvement)

They have aligned the initiative with both the Catholic Social Teaching and the charism of the Institute

The process that they followed to deliver the program included:

- A mission statement developed collaboratively

- The appointment of a Steering Group that developed a strategy, a plan and a budget

- Finally, communities and organizations partaking in the charism are developing yearly plans, monitoring processes and yearly evaluations on which they base the new project cycle.

**SLIDE 26 – URSULINES OF JESUS**

They have developed Integral Ecology Guidelines for the Institute at general, community and personal levels

They started with reading Laudato si’ and reflecting on its various dimensions: environmental, economic, social, cultural, spiritual and lifestyle

= Then they set up a process, which included:

- Monthly messages to communities on LS and consequential actions

- These found very good reception and good practices suggested were adopted by local communities

- They also made room for sharing within the Congregation about the local experiences, creating the conditions for accompanying them along a common journey

- Finally, having taken stock of what works well for them, they have come up with guidelines.

**SLIDE 27 – SERVANTS OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA**

Here we have yet another approach. They started with training the local superiors on Laudato si’.

These animated their community on the study of the Encyclical, relating it to their Constitutions, to their charism. From such dialogue, communities were able to suggest some proposals on how to promote Integral Ecology.

Then they were able to move from local contributions to a shared, global aim for their 6 year Plan (‘16-’21)

They supported this whole process through some formation initiatives and spiritual exercises.

- Monthly messages to communities on LS and consequential actions

- These found very good reception and good practices suggested were adopted by local communities

**SLIDE 28 – IN CONCLUSION…**

Time is running out to fix economy, protect the Earth, help the poor. As Pope Francis said (10/10/20):

- “As the term ‘countdown’ suggests, we must act urgently,”

- “Each one of us can play a valuable role if we all set out today. Not tomorrow, today”