



In Mission

2020



Waste funding
education

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All things are
interconnected

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Teaching our
heritage

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*We can all work as instruments of God
for the care of creation,*

Laudato Si', 14

For the Care of All



Sister Roxanne Schares,
General Superior

The year 2020 will not easily be forgotten with the global crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Great efforts continue to be made to restore and protect our health, our livelihoods, our very wellbeing. The experience of the pandemic has made us more aware of the webs of life in which we exist and of how very vulnerable and interconnected and interdependent we all are.

We are coming to realize, “We cannot pretend to be healthy in a world that is sick. The wounds inflicted on our mother earth are wounds that also bleed in us.” (Pope Francis, Letter to the President of Colombia, World Environment Day, 5 June 2020) Embracing the truth of our common health, our common humanity and home impels us to take prophetic action directed toward life, with a new vision that encompasses every aspect of the global crisis and our world reality (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 137)

The special *Laudato Si'* anniversary year, 24 May 2020 - 24 May 2021, is particularly relevant in these times, for it provides an opportunity for us to transform the present suffering and struggle into a new way of living together. It calls for living an integral ecology and shaping a new paradigm, based on bonds of communion, bonds of compassionate care and solidarity, of peace and sustainability. Indeed, before us is the possibility of a true Kairos experience, a moment of grace and “Jubilee” for Earth and all humanity, for all creation.

Caring for Earth, our common home, and for all humanity and the whole of creation is part of living the Gospel. Everyone has a role. All gifts, talents, and actions, no matter how great or small, are worthwhile and needed. In this issue of *In Mission*, we see how School Sisters of Notre Dame in various countries engage in education and advocacy, in collaboration and partnership with others for the dignity of life and the care of all creation. (cf. Directional Statement *Love Gives Everything*) These concrete expressions of love and care help create a future with hope.

Our faith in God and our love of God must be made real in our lives, that is, be translated into life and into action. Loving God demands that we participate in God's life, loving and caring for all God loves, for all God has made.

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Taking responsibility for Earth

Sister Helen Galadima (AF, Ghana)

Reflecting on the theme of advocacy for creation, SSNDs quickly realize it is a call to take care of God's creation. We are to be advocates and spokespersons, who give support to an idea or an action that is at the core of our mission, while at the same time assisting others in living their beliefs. We advocate by example.

As advocates for creation, many African sisters stand with troubled minds and heavy hearts when they see the clear cutting of trees without planting seedlings to take their place. They reminisce about walks with their parents and grandparents through vast wooded areas. As youth, they had firewood to use and fresh food to eat without fear of herbicides and pesticides. How could it now be possible for sisters to advocate for Earth by partnering with others?

Many sisters are trying to teach the next generation the ecological practices of the past. In the secondary school in The Gambia, from the first day of admission, each student is given a square meter of land and seedlings. The first year she might grow kale; the next year it may be tomatoes; the third and final academic year,



Sisters Ejura Elizabeth Michael and Maryanne Ekam with students in their school garden

Photo: Sister Carolyn Anyega

she may raise onions. The students are taught how to cultivate crops in a way that is respectful of the environment while benefitting society. And yes, the students are graded on their work.

Some of the produce they raise is used for school meals, and some of it is sold to feed low income families. Profits also help finance the school. The parents are pleased because they see their children learning to take responsibility for the Earth and for each other.

My city without electronic and electrical waste

Text and Photo: Sister M. Chiara Burzyńska (PO, Poland)



Two tons of electronic and electrical waste

Ask School Sisters of Notre Dame in Poland what is at the heart of their educational ministry and they will point to “their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator” as essential to their faith’.” (*Laudato Si'*, 64) Therefore, they look for ways to encourage and motivate children and their families to take actions which positively affect the environment. They believe little actions can shape a lifestyle.

continued on page 4

Educating and living Shalom values

Sister M. Yvonne Nosal (ALC, Peru)

Our Shalom Center in Lomas Altas, Jicamarca, Lima, Peru is a dream come true. It became reality thanks to the support of the congregational Ministry Fund. Our Center is a safe place where children can come on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons to meet and enjoy a variety of games and activities.

More importantly, they have the opportunity to learn and live the values of Shalom, that is, to be in good relationship with one's self, with others, with God, and with all creation. During January and February, when there are no classes at the school, the children enjoy participating in "Creative Holidays" activities such as exercises, games, tai chi, recycling, and creating mandalas.

Last year we reflected on some aspects of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, by Pope Francis. We discussed respecting one another and honoring the customs/culture of indigenous cultures. We worked together to care for the variety of trees, high cactus plants, and other vegetation on our property. The children are also encouraged to start and care for plants in their homes. All activities help the children understand that they are caretakers of Earth.

Lately we talked about the apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, where Pope Francis names his four dreams for the earth (honor the rights of the poor, preserve its distinctive culture, preserve its natural beauty, and give the Church community new faces with Amazonian features). These dreams give the children a greater sense of their unique identity and responsibility to care for their home.



In promoting the values of Shalom the children water and care for the plants in our garden.

Photo: Estela Olivares

. . . My city without electronic and electrical waste

The sisters realize that "local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill in their students a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land." (*Laudato Si'*, 179)

An example of this happened in 2019. The sisters and students in the kindergarten in Katowice took part in a nationwide "Tęczą" [Rainbow] project called, "My City without Electronic and Electrical Waste." Twice during this event the parents of the children, their friends, young people from one high school and people from

the neighborhood collected electronic and electrical waste. When they tallied the amount, they had two tons of waste stored on the back porch of the kindergarten.

Thanks to this united effort, the kindergarten received points which can be exchanged for teaching aids. Many people appreciated the fact that in this way they could support the kindergarten. More importantly, this collection was an occasion to promote environment-friendly attitudes and common actions in our local environment.

*This is why the earth herself... is among
the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.*

Laudato Si', 2

Providing life-saving access to water

Caelie Haines (AM, USA)

In one of four commitments, the Atlantic-Midwest Province (AM) has dedicated itself to the right for all peoples to have access to clean water. This is especially important during a pandemic, when access to soap and water could mean the difference between life and death.

Through partnership with **Beyond Borders** the AM Province has had great success in improving life in the Haitian village of Lagonov, where lack of running water makes residents reliant on difficult daily trips to collect clean water for cooking, cleaning, hygiene, and

residents with water catchment systems. These storage containers collect rainwater which can be used for hydration, hygiene, and gardening. By growing vegetables, the residents have a source of income and improve their family's nutrition and health.

Sisters and associates have responded enthusiastically, organizing fundraisers for these catchment systems in their residences and ministries. Sponsored ministries are doing their part, too, with "Change for Haiti" jars, set up to collect spare change. Theme days in the schools provide opportunities

for learning about water as students participate in fun activities as they reach out to others. Due to the generosity of province donors and students, 120 families now have catchment systems that provide them with life-changing access to water.

Additionally, the province engages in education and advocacy efforts regarding the spirituality and vitality of water around the world and how to protect it. They advocate changes, such as the elimination of plastic

bottled water and straws, and other plastics that pollute the earth's water and threaten the life that is dependent on it.



Enjoying the gift of safe water

Photo: Beyond Borders

gardens. Climate change threatens their water sources and their crops, resulting in food insecurity and hunger. This partnership effort improves these situations by providing

Living responsibly for creation

Sister Manuela Ranzinger (BY, Germany)

In March 2017, the Bavarian Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Center for Environment and Culture (ZUK) in Benediktbeuern, Germany formed a cooperative agreement entitled, "Lived Responsibility for Creation." These partners committed themselves to foster an integrated ecology, as fostered by Pope Francis. Four of our educational institutions committed themselves to carrying out projects with the children over a two to three-year period that reflects this integrated approach. Other participants include teachers, parents and employees of Benediktbeuern.

Sister Maria-Theresia Knippschild



Sister Manuela Ranzinger with the students in the garden

Photos : Gelebte Schöpfungsverantwortung

A participating institution is St. Theresia Kindergarten in Geisenfeld, Germany. Sr. Manuela Ranzinger, Kindergarten Manager and Pedagogical Leader of St. Theresia Kindergarten, explains the project.

For two years we intensively engaged in learning about the formation of Earth. As a kindergarten we went searching for traces of creation. Everyone participated – children, parents, and employees. In Geisenfeld we found other partners who financially and physically supported our project. The Centre for Environment and Culture in Benediktbeuern developed our pedagogical concepts.

The project started a planting campaign in the garden, where our kindergarten families planted fruit trees and berry shrubs along the fence.

Companies in neighboring cities, mayors, and people associated with our facility sponsored this event. Despite the pouring rain, it was a promising start, followed by a variety of other projects.

Throughout the year, we consciously observed the changes in nature with the children. Our children have learned many things. They learned how nature can help itself and what alternatives there are to chemical pest control in the garden. They found out what it means to plant something and take responsibility for it. They learned how we can live in an environmentally sustainable world. We all learned that together we can stay healthy, discover and protect Earth.



Exploring what lives in our water

Caring for our common home

Sister Kathy Schmittgens, former International Shalom Coordinator

In the summer of 2015, just weeks after the promulgation of *Laudato Si'*, the Shalom network held its first Seminar involving all those who served as contacts for Shalom. Cardinal Peter Turkson was one of our main presenters. Since he was one of the principal authors of the document, we were privileged to hear first-hand the origin and the hope for this papal letter

This May we celebrated the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. Its message is even more critical today than it was five years ago. The Vatican Dicastery (office) for Integral Human Development declared May 16 – 24 as *Laudato Si'* week. In a typical year we would have been able to celebrate in the streets of Rome and especially in St. Peter's Square, but 2020 is not typical.

We needed to celebrate virtually through online webinars. Our generalate community had a unique opportunity to use the week to educate ourselves on the critical messages of



Sisters Dorothy Enang and Zipporah Marigwa aiding with the planting of the tree

Photo: Sister Linda Marie Bos

the encyclical. We met each evening to look at the chapters of the encyclical through song, PowerPoints, and video. The presentations were only 20 minutes long but gave food for further personal reflection.

We had the opportunity to sign the [Laudato Si' Pledge](#). It is simply a pledge to do three things: pray for and with creation, live more simply, and advocate to protect our common home. The pledge is a reminder to all of us that our care for creation is itself praise for the Creator.

As a physical reminder that we spent the week learning and praying, a tree was planted behind the chapel as part of our Vespers. We blessed the ground by “pouring libation”, a common practice in Africa to remember all those who have gone before us. We prayed that the generations yet to come would still be able to enjoy God's creation.



[Laudato Si' Pledge Card](#)

Using the gift of children's curiosity

Sabine Velikovsky (ÖR-IT/CE, Austria)

The Private People's School in Kritzensdorf, Austria is part of the School Association of SSND of Austria. The school emphasizes positive thinking that focuses on appreciation, tolerance, and respect for people, animals, and the environment. This academic vision inspired one of the parents, an expert in gardening, to try a new approach to instilling this vision. On a few meters of land, she created a school garden project. With the help of the sisters and other parents, it is now over 3000 square meters.

Through this gardening experience, the 200 students come to understand marketing and gardening skills, scientific knowledge, labor, and the patience necessary to grow vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs. Working together and sharing responsibility leads the students to the joy of cooking and tasting the results of their efforts.

This project has great variety. It includes eight high beds for vegetables. There are raspberry hedges and plots for potatoes and pumpkins. One can see beautiful flower beds, fruit trees, and even a pharmacist's garden.

Twice a year, the parents and teachers have a planning meeting to determine which areas will be assigned to the different classes. As

soon as possible, plants are brought to the classes and from March forward small groups take turns looking after their class garden.

Since the seasonal harvest is the highlight for the children, vegetables most suitable for immediate consumption are grown. Home-made products like soup mixtures and lavender bags are also on sale at the annual summer festival.

The gardening year ends with harvesting the potatoes, attending the pumpkin festivals, baking apple strudels, and best of all, the boiling of jam.



Unsplash: Bill Oxford

School Sisters of Notre Dame who work in the Private People's School teach by being living examples of respecting creation, and of respecting the gifts and talents of everyone. Sisters work to awaken the children's curiosity and to create in them habits of sustainable living and appreciation for the gifts of the Earth.

Everything is interconnected

Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, UN-NGO Director

Last February, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, homelessness was the primary theme of the Commission for Social Development. The NGOs Working Group to End Homelessness and the Committee for Social Development worked hard to raise awareness among the member states and other stakeholders that housing is a human right, and homelessness is a global problem. According to UN-Habitat, there is a worldwide estimate of 1.6 billion people who are homeless.

Homelessness affects not only the financial poor, "but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families." (*Laudato Si'*, 152) The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet expresses the conviction that everything in the world is connected.

All human beings are part of nature. What we do in favor of or against nature affects all

Learning respect for Earth by doing

Sister Terezija Hostnik (SI, Slovenia)

In Slovenia, care of creation is a significant part of a person's education from kindergarten through university. Ecology and respect for Earth is taught as part of all subjects. The sisters deepen this learning as they "educate, advocate and act in collaboration with others for the dignity of life and care of all creation." Directional Statement, *Love Gives Everything*)

Ecology and respect for Earth are lived out during the summer holiday camps, where SSNDs are able to work with girls ages 10 to 18. The girls live in community with the sisters from four to six days. They share prayer and speak of their relationship with God, other people' and nature. Daily, they ponder the biblical creation story, discuss material from *Laudato Si'*, and share their insights about the interconnection between water, plants, animals, and human beings, who are all part of the vast universe. Through a variety of workshops, the girls learn how to use secondhand materials to demonstrate reverence for Earth.

In the cooking workshop, a team of four girls, work with Sister Cirila Hostnik to prepare food for the whole community. They enjoy learning how to use vegetables from the garden, prepare healthy meals, and plan meals for those with special diets. All the students learn the value and responsibility of eating the food, even if it is new for them.

In the afternoons and evenings, there is time for walks in the forest or park where they



Photo: Sister Martina Radež

observe many animals and plants or they reflect silently on the splendid waterfall. On their walks, they have special tasks. For example, in the forest they choose a tree they see as special and make a painting of it. In the evening, they share a story about the tree with the other girls.

In the sewing workshops, sisters provide them with material remnants and demonstrate how to make backpacks. In another workshop, they are taught how to use tightly rolled newspaper to make storage containers. In both activities, the youth learn not to waste any of God's gifts.

Annually, the girls return to the holiday camps and bring friends with them. They like the simple way of living, making new friends, and learning how to use recycled materials. At the end of each camp, the parents come to a closing ceremony where the students demonstrate what they learned.

. . . Everything is interconnected

humanity(*Laudato Si'*, 139); thus, the degradation of the environment affects the quality of human life. Some of the human roots of the ecological crisis that has led many of our sisters and brothers to live on the streets is the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. Most affected are rural communities where natural disasters force people to migrate within or outside their own countries.

Pope Francis calls all humanity to an ecological conversion, a transformation of hearts and minds. This is a conversion to acknowledge, "Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness." (*Laudato Si'*, 69) Thus when we respect the goodness of every creature, we live in harmony with all creation.

To grow a community

Trudy C. Hamilton (CP, USA)

[Living Earth Center \(LEC\)](#) at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Mankato, Minnesota, USA, is a sponsored ministry of SSND that includes a vast network of gardeners, volunteers and advocates who share common ground while building a resilient community that honors the interconnection of all things and the value of this living Earth.

The Community Garden is one of the most stunning features of this facility. On a typical summer day at the community gardens, gardeners work, chat and offer support to each other. The sisters stroll through the gardens, tend their plots and help where needed.

Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.

Laudato Si', 67

Manifestations of this are seen in the vast array of educational and spiritual enrichment programs as well as advocacy training and networking presentations. There is a free library and resource room that is open to all who use LEC.

"Today, we have over 100 gardeners," said Sister Mary Tacheny, co-founder of the gardens. "It makes no difference who you are. If you want a plot, you can have a plot for a small fee, which is waived if you can't afford it. People say that on any given day, the community gardens resemble a mini United Nations because of the sheer number of diverse people who come here to garden." Children have their own garden area where they work together and are taught how to identify, grow and care for plants.

"The concept of LEC is essentially to provide a community growing space, both in the literal and figurative sense," said Laura Peterson, Executive Director of LEC. "When you have a healthy ecosystem, you find diversity, unity and people working together to build a resilient community. That means growing not only food, but also good and right relationships with one another."

While gardeners may start out growing tomatoes, fruits and vegetables, they end up growing something a lot bigger, they grow a community.



Gardeners at work

Photo: Sister Mary Kay Ash

Earth teaching us our heritage

Zsófi Katona (MG, Hungary)



Sisters gathered at Aviary Community Center

Photo: Sister Judit Lobmayer

The Hungarian Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame has been carrying out a variety of missionary activities in three villages in the foothills of Mátra, an economically challenged region of Hungary. One of these is Markaz, where the “Aviary” Community Center is home to cultural, artistic and adult education programs as well as summer camps for disadvantaged children. An important and continuing aspect in the design of the house is that most of the furnishings are recycled or handcrafted products, which reflect traditional Hungarian folk culture.

This focus on preserving Hungarian culture led the community to join an initiative of the “Ombudsman of Future Generations” and to reach an agreement with the Plant Diversity Center of Tápiószele in an effort to cultivate varieties of fruit trees that have a long presence in the Carpathian Basin. The garden created in Markaz is on a plot leased from the parish. This land had been neglected for many years and it lacked a fence to protect the trees from game damage.

Volunteers, including members of the Markaz parish council, and with the help of a few paid day laborers, managed to clear and plow the land. They built a temporary fence which was later replaced with a permanent fence. Trained volunteers, including the sisters, care for the saplings. In a few years it is hoped that the trees will bear fruit, thus preserving the heirloom varieties for future generations.

The gardeners decided to use a method called deep mulching. They created plant beds by layering mulch 20 to 60 cm above the soil enabling them to raise vegetables free of herbicides and pesticides. The pandemic quarantine appeared to suspend all their plans but some of the sisters filled the void. For example, Sister Hedvig Gottfried started tomato and pepper seedlings, transplanted them, and cared for them as they grew. Other sisters cared for the young fruit trees. The lesson from this undertaking is that as a community they were caring for the earth and Earth was teaching the participants their heritage.

So what does all this mean?

Throughout this issue of ***In Mission*** we have looked at the call of Pope Francis to care for and treasure the gift of creation.



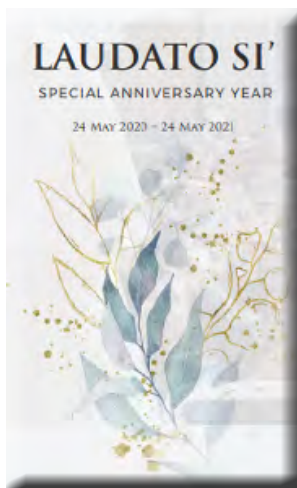
"Karolina"
sculpted by Sister Marie
Henderson RSM

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, he points out that caring for creation is more than eradicating pollution. He challenges us to look at the interconnection between human institutions and the whole community of creation. To do this the whole person needs to be valued. Mother Theresa believed in educating the whole person to be a valuable part of society. In 1875, she wrote "We must, all responsibly cherish God's work."
(Mother Theresa 5025)



Pope Francis

Imagine conversations between these two leaders... one from the 19th century and one from today. What would they say to each other and to us? What if we joined in the conversation, what would we say? During *Laudato Si'* Year, we are invited to spend time reflecting on and taking an active part in caring for our common home.



Dicastery for Promoting Integral
Human Development

Resources

Laudato Si': http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Laudato Si' Pledge: <https://livelaudatosi.org/>

Querida Amazonia: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html

Laudato Si' Year Resources: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/laudato-si-resources>



**School Sisters of
Notre Dame**

Transforming the world through education

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