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UISG Campaign for the Planet: *Laudato Si* and the Way Forward Presentation of a Commitment on the Environment

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“When we speak of the ‘environment’ what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it.” (LS#139)

Foundation

On June 18, 2018, the UISG Board launched the campaign: *Sowing Hope for the Planet*, sharing efforts of women religious in putting *Laudato Si* into practice. Already, *Laudato Si* was spreading throughout religious communities, becoming a deeply meaningful connection with people and the earth through faith and the words of Pope Francis. This realization led to the awareness of this phenomenon developing into a deeper interconnection, carrying the message to a global network of religious working together to “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS #49) This collective listening creates a collective voice and a collective action that carries a powerful potential for making the message a reality rather than doing it as individuals. Emphasizing the fundamental connection that exists between the environmental crisis and the social crisis that we are currently experiencing, Pope Francis asks us for a personal and communal ecological conversion, often reminding us that “everything is interconnected.”

History

The timing of the campaign comes with the growing awareness and urgency of climate change and the need to address its impact on the environment and society. *Laudato Si* offers a spiritual relationship and solutions to a seriously critical situation that are so desperately needed in our world today. It begins with awareness and unfolds with inspiration, giving our Sisters’ voice the influential power to make a difference, coordinating experiences that provide them and their connections the opportunities to become fully sensitive to the situation of our common home, so as “to dare to turn what is happening to the world into their own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” (LS#19)

This provided an opportunity to not only develop a network that could help to spread what is being done, but also to highlight the work of women religious. For a long time, many have actively been working to stop the Earth’s devastation and its people, and this gathering, highlights their action and commitments.

The concept note was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Secretariat and the Global Catholic Climate Movement through the initiative of the International Union of Superior Generals (UISG), bringing together the richness and connections of its member congregations, so that the “interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.” (LS#164)

Having a carefully developed plan has enabled us to fold into the framework new ways forward that would emerge from our experience with the webinars and our knowledge of the evolving needs of our care for creation. The structure of the plan was to:

- Coordinate efforts of the members of UISG
- Utilize the best means of communication
- Evaluate the effectiveness
- Find the best way to strengthen coordination
- Partner with organizations
- Develop a statement for the campaign at the Plenary to promote the position of UISG

Original action plans included:

- Webinars to announce the campaign and as an ongoing way to coordinate
- Coordinating prayers in various translations
- Celebrating the Season of Creation

- Observance of World Water Day on March 22
- Celebrating Earth Day on April 22
- Promoting GCCM ongoing opportunities for participation

Developing a timeline by means of the five webinars that have taken place offers a view of the organic development of the campaign. Topics were not initially planned, but rather unfolded as we opened the space and allowed the action to transform, following the natural passion and creativity of those involved. Thus, as Pope Francis states “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education.” (LS #15)

Webinar #1: *Laudato Si’: Everything is Interconnected*

- Launching the campaign with objectives, actions, witnessing potential, and beneficiaries
- **Developing the foundational relationship that we are all interconnected...** with each other, with the earth, with all living beings

Webinar #2: *Saving Our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth*

- **Developing the awareness of the critical situations our world is in as well as opportunities to meet the challenges presented therein.**
- Third anniversary of *Laudato Si*.
- Pope Francis asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”
- Focus on how to create a massive movement to meet the crises in our world.

Webinar #3: *Inspiring Action with Love: Stories from Around the Globe*

- **Developing the Presence of Strategic Plans in Global Action.**
- Focus on the promotion that has occurred and hearing for the first time from women religious who are engaged in action.

Webinar #4: *In Solidarity: Interconnecting Global and Local Concerns*

- **Developing the Impact of Major Meetings for the Life of the Planet and Coordinated Action.**
- Campaign progress with the upcoming launch of the website.
- Contributions from those who participated in major meetings and who could offer best practices for major concerns.

Webinar #5: *Growing Seeds of Hope: Listening to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*

- **Developing the Integration of Attending to the Needs of the Earth and the Poor.**
- Contributions from speakers whose communities have a process for the action they are engaging in globally.

Guided by the basic flexible framework for the campaign, we became more aware of the situations and the needs expressed by the Sisters and the richness shared with their resources. Expectations became clearer.

We affirmed the work which was already being done. We had a balance of sharing the work of the Sisters in various countries, in diverse ministries and in different stages of development. We also included information from the major events such as the third anniversary of *Laudato Si*, COP 24, Preparations for the Synod on the Amazon and updates from GCCM which is involved in a number of Catholic Church related experiences. Honoring guidance from *Laudato Si*, indeed, the process was recognizing the work of the Sisters, “to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.” (LS#210)

Events and Resources

With ongoing development from the experience of women religious, the need became clear for an interactive platform that could hold the enormity of all the Sisters have been doing and be entirely dedicated to their works and which could be an interactive tool for them to both share and organize their efforts. A dedicated website would fulfill all of the needs which became apparent as we made our way forward... thus, the website was born.

The website, in six languages, offers various pages of information about the campaign and goals, with interactive and unifying areas which are updated regularly.

- Home page: highlights, news, and an action map which are updated with current information and the map growing a leaf at each location of action a sister has shared.
- Goals page: informational, with the goals of the campaign.
- Events page: updated with both upcoming and past opportunities for participation; this can include international days such as, World Water Day, Earth Day, webinars, Season of Creation, etc.
- Resources page: the heart of the website... it is the joint effort of the sisters and their willingness to share what they are doing and materials they are using in their efforts.
- Contact page: for contacting campaign coordinators.

A newsletter has been created to highlight what is happening, what is coming up, and as a way for congregations to get the big picture of where we are at. Through regular e-mail, a condensed version of what is happening is provided.

Moving to the heart of the campaign with the Sisters listening to the “cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor,” and what they are doing about it, we have prepared a video demonstrating some of the situations which are “both cries of the earth and of the poor.” The second part shows the various works that Sisters have shared with us from their congregational action and missions.

Where We are At

As seen in the video, congregations are engaging in many important works. There is much that we can learn as we network and encourage one another to share resources. These works are occurring all over the world and we have the opportunity to bring them all together here to allow them to grow and spread in a joint effort gathered under a unifying perspective. From a Sister's efforts, certain themes emerged and categories of action determined how their efforts would be organized, with their selection and appropriate placement.

- Local and global communities
- Advocacy
- Parish
- Congregation
- *Laudato Si* study/course materials
- Schools: elementary, middle school, high school, and college

To understand the effect of both the campaign and the work of the Sisters, the following data were gathered:

- Video statistics:
 - Season of Creation in 4 languages: Nearly 2000 views
 - World Water Day in 5 languages: Nearly 17,000 views
- Webinars participants: for the April 11 session, 359 registration and many of those included groups of Sisters who gathered to view the session together

Interviews were also conducted with important connections:

- Sr. Alaide Deretti, FMA, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians and General Councilor for Missions
 - *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology. She will explore the importance of the synod; insights from the preparation process; helpful information for the universal church; and, suggestions for engagement during the synod.*
- Tomás Insua, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) and Collaborator of the UISG Campaign: Sowing Hope for the Planet
 - *Discuss the mission of GCCM; programs and events of Season of Creation; Engagement with the synod; COP25; Celebration of Earth Day 50th anniversary; 5th Anniversary of Laudato Si; efforts to include Sisters in various offerings and in major events.*
- Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, SDB, Coordinator of the sector on Ecology and Creation in the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development (DPIHD)
 - *Discuss the purpose of the section and describe some of the upcoming program opportunities: 4th anniversary of Laudato Si in Nairobi, Kenya (July); World Water Day (22 March); Celebration of Earth Day 50th anniversary; and, 5th anniversary of Laudato Si.*

Moving Forward: Where are we going? Where do we want to go? Next steps

One major opportunity provided by the campaign is to raise a united voice and develop a collective strength to impact what is happening in our world. What is clear in our world history is that designated power structures usually are given the bigger say in what is happening and, often, the loudest voice. The UISG is a unifying voice for the Sisters around the world. Through this campaign, we have the opportunity to organize the voice of the Sisters in the effort on many levels of structures in order to enhance and recognize our contribution to the care of our Common Home.

Again, our hope is that the campaign will be a platform that brings these works together in a global movement by banding together in our efforts. The uniqueness of the campaign is that it is a myriad of efforts in many areas which can be brought together under the broad umbrella of "hearing the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor."

We join our efforts with the universal Church and our partners with local, national and global influence. The next steps include planned events and participation in points of action, and use of the momentum and energy of established days/events as tools to further spread the message of all. These are opportunities we want to promote and ensure we are participating in.

Future of Campaign

Survey Comments

Some themes that emerged from the survey about the future of the campaign offer us an opportunity to listen to the participants and to allow them to influence the unfolding of the campaign. It is important for their voices to be heard.

There were a number of suggestions for us to consider in the future for the campaign:

- Have the resources available in even more languages
- Provide a practical orientation for those beginning to be involved in the campaign
- Promote the use of a survey as a guide in helping to develop the spirituality of a congregation for Sowing Hope for the Planet
- Sessions on divestments in fossil fuels and investments in alternative energy resources
- Interest in information on the carbon footprint
- Have a place for sharing ideas
- Affirmation of working in solidarity
- Continue collecting such good resources from our religious communities

Much gratitude is continually expressed for the networking that has taken place because of the campaign. Groups have gathered to hear the webinars in their different languages and to discuss this experience in the common language of the group. The experience has increased the awareness of what the Sisters and their connections are doing to live *Laudato Si*. The live space of the webinars, even at global distances, allows us to come together in a dynamic way and to grow together as religious Sisters. We are seeing what we all are doing and experiencing our pain, we are engaging our efforts in the spiritual contexts of our congregations following of the Gospel and carefully thought through actions. Celebrations have brought joy to our efforts to bring hope.

The campaign needs your support in order for it to thrive and realize its potential. If you have not done so, please submit the name of a contact person from your congregation who would be responsible for sharing the information of the campaign with all of the Sisters. While we send out information to everyone in our contact list, it is still an important aspect to have one person who will be responsible for disseminating any campaign information and opportunities to their congregations, so all sisters are having the opportunity to be involved.

Commitment for the common good in our environment, our common home

After a year of reflecting on the work we have been doing together and taking seriously the call to take into our hearts the pain of the world, we accept the responsibility to determine what is ours to do. As international congregations we need to look at the ways we have been guilty of environmental destruction and disregard for these consequences to one another and especially to the poor. Sisters are present in countries where the lifestyle negatively impacts the rise in temperature, effecting climate change and where they are most affected by climate change. Our communities are both intimate with the cause and effect. With our personal commitment to one another, we are ideally positioned to respond compassionately in an integrated effort. As a community of Sisters living the Gospel, in solidarity with one another, we know that everything is interconnected, and we wish to live our religious life for the common good in our environment, our common home.

Therefore,

*We commit ourselves to both personal and communal conversion and
We wish to move forward together in an orchestrated and coordinated response in
Listening to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor
As we go forth as instruments of hope
In the heart of the world.*

As Pope Francis reminds us, “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” (LS14)

As a result of our commitment, each General Superior is asked to discern appropriate action in one of the areas:

1. Observing of the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4)
2. Engaging in the experience of the Synod “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology”
3. Following prayerfully the events of the Synod
4. Advocating for the rights of indigenous people
5. Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Earth Day (April 22)
6. Celebrating the 5th Anniversary of *Laudato Si*
7. Supporting youth involvement in the campaign
8. Advocating for the commitment for countries to sustain targets to not exceed of 1.5 Celsius rise in global temperature
9. Deciding to divest from fossil fuels and investments into alternative energy projects
10. Choosing to observe international days
11. Considering other suggestions

Thank you for all you do to make the world a better place!

Respectfully submitted: Sheila Kinsey, FCJM
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