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Integrity of Creation among Religious: International Survey

Status Report

November 2008

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"I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue... Christians, in particular, realize that their duty towards nature and creation are an essential part of their faith."

Pope John Paul II, Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation - January 1, 1990

"My dear friends, God's creation is one and it is good. The concerns for non-violence, sustainable development, justice and peace, and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity."

Pope Benedict XVI addressing the Youth in Sydney - July 17, 2008

"For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands... for humans to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances--these are sins."

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Southern California - 1997

I. Introduction to the Report

The Integrity of Creation working group of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission, USG/UISG, based in Rome, decided to try to find out what religious men and women around the world were doing for the environment. The working group, established in November 2007, consists of 14 JPIC Promoters from different religious congregations and two lay people.

A short letter with 3 survey questions, translated into 5 languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German), was sent out via email through International JPIC Promoters to religious worldwide and through the USG/UISG mailing lists to General Curiae in Rome.

This document does not pretend to be fully comprehensive. It is a summary statement and does not mention every initiative. We apologize if we have offended any sensibilities by certain omissions. It is an attempt to concisely give an overview of some of the ecological initiatives taking place among the various congregations throughout the world who responded.

We are publishing this summary in four languages – English, French, Spanish and Italian – so we are conscious of keeping it relatively short. The working group is very aware that many religious engaged in this field of work may not have received the survey. Others, because of work pressure, may not have had time to reply. For this reason, we invite you to consider this document as a first draft, which, hopefully, will be updated with supplementary material and information in the future, possibly by setting up a Wiki page on the internet.

A. Number of respondents

As of May 2008, we received 114 responses to the survey from 49 religious institutes around the world.¹ Names of institutes were given in different languages, which explains why the names of some institutes may appear more than once on the list.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of Religious Institutes who responded to the Survey

B. Analysis of Work

The religious institutes were asked what had been done in the following 3 areas²:

- General and Provincial Chapter resolutions
- Educational resources developed
- Work being done (ecology/environment projects)

II. GENERAL AND PROVINCIAL CHAPTER RESOLUTIONS

Based on the reports, 26 religious institutes have passed resolutions at General and Provincial levels focusing mainly on the endorsement of the Earth Charter and on eco-spirituality.

The following are some examples of General Chapter resolutions:

- Identified Climate Change as the most serious ecological challenge facing humanity and the planet. Recommendations were (i) to organize educational programmes to motivate all Columbans (ii) conduct a 'Carbon Audit' and (iii) network with other groups and pool resources. (Society of St. Columban, General and Provincial Chapter 2006).
- "Develop and articulate an SCN corporate voice around significant issues, especially concerning care of the earth and justice for the poor, the oppressed and women. (The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, 2003 General Assembly)
- Resolution: (1) To encourage Brothers to engage in radical relationships of equality with all God's creation and to support the Earth Charter. (2) To promote networking across the Congregation on issues of justice and right relationships. (Christian Brothers, 2002 General Chapter).
- Recommended: 'That the General Council create a committee to assist in the implementation of our primary orientation...' [that is to] 'Promote a culture of peace and nonviolence...which cannot be promoted without concern for the environment.' (Institut Notre Dame du Bon Conseil de Montreal, July 2005)

III. RESOURCES DEVELOPED

Many congregations around the world have developed resources to be used in the classroom and in every day life as a way of promoting JPIC.

1. Ecology being offered as a subject in schools.

Two religious institutes are offering ecology as a school subject, or running special educational programs in their local schools.

- Esclavas del Sagrado Corazon de Jesús (Argentina, Peru, Rome) are offering ecology and biology as a school subject, focusing on environmental protection and ecology workshops.
- School Sisters of Notre Dame (St. Louis, USA) have started an Inter-school Ecological Council which aims to promote ecology among different congregations.

² See Appendix 2 for a copy of the Survey letter and questions asked.

2. Eco-calendars

- The Benedictines in Plankstetten (Germany) produce an annual calendar with a specific theme: 2005 (water) / 2006 (energy) / 2007 (Fairtrade).
- Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (Perú) also develop environmental calendars.

3. Libraries

- Sisters of Providence (Washington) and the Columbans (New Zealand) encouraged the local library to expand their section on ecology.

4. Pamphlets

- Claretinos Misioneros (Spain) produced a pamphlet “A Rough Guide to Ecology”.
- Intercongregational Franciscan JPIC Working Group (Rome 2000-2003) produced resources on Climate Change and Water in more than 15 languages.

5. Conferences and Workshops

The following are among 31 respondents who have held Conferences or Workshops on ecology.

- Missionary Society of St Columban: In September 2007 Columbans from 14 countries met in Manila, the Philippines to begin to formulate a Society response to the challenges of climate change. They are particularly committed to environmental issues as a group,

6. Collaboration

Five respondents are collaborating with various organizations such as the Government, the local library and most importantly with other local congregations.

- Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Atlanta, USA) collaborated with the local government to help start a recycling project.
- Santísimo Sacramento y María Inmaculada set up a working group along with the local government and carry out various environmental projects such as reforestation.

7. Expertise

- The Ursuline Sisters (Kentucky) raise cattle, pigs, hay, wheat, soybeans, corn, potatoes, and other garden produce. The Ursulines provide retreats and have cooperated with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Brescia University, and various local school systems for some programs
- Carmalites O.Carm (Argentina): One of their men is a Doctor at the Buenos Aires University in the area of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, specialised in Climate Variability and Global Change.
- Columbans (Ireland): Organize a two year distance MA programme on Ecology and Religion

8. Environmental Stations of the Cross

- The Franciscans (Taiwan) have adopted this idea.

IV. WORK IN PROGRESS - ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

1. Organic Farming

10 respondents are practicing organic farming/gardening in their local area.

- Sisters of Charity (New York) provide a lot of their own food through organic farming.
- Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (New Zealand) are collaborating with the National Health Service running an organic garden club.
- Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (East Timor) have invited ecological experts to give a seminar to local farmers in the neighbourhood.
- Society of Jesus (Jesuits, Zambia) have developed a large-scale organic project where they run short courses for local farmers and have started tree-planting projects around the local area.
- Sisters of Charity (New York) have created the Sisters Hill Farm - a 200 member community-supported agriculture Organic Farm in Stanfordville, New York.

2. Animal Rights

- The Franciscans (Taiwan) have a yearly animal blessing with an animal rights' advocacy and an owners responsibility education focus.

3. Rainwater Harvesting

- The Union of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (India) and the School Sisters of Notre Dame (Minnesota) harvest water for farm use.

4. Keeping local communities garbage free

- Sisters of Christian Charity (North American Eastern Province) encourage local communities to assume responsibility to keep roads in their areas litter free.
- Irmãs de São José de Chambéry – França (Rio De Janeiro) promote a project on reusing food and encourage others to avoid waste.

5. Funding

- Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (New Zealand) are among 4 Institutes who have availed of government grants. The sisters began an organic garden to encourage and teach about healthy eating.

6. Lobbying

- Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (India) are lobbying politicians in favor of victims in the Tsunami-hit areas in relation to relief and rehabilitation services.

7. Transportation

Three congregations are looking at alternate ways of traveling in order to protect the environment.

- Sisters of Providence (Spokane, USA) are encouraging their sisters to purchase hybrid vehicles.

- Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption have pledged to use public transport whenever possible.

8. Full-time coordinators and Eco-Centres

- The Christian Brothers (Australia, Ireland) appointed an international facilitator for Eco-justice. They have several centres for ecology and spirituality.
- Missionaries of Africa (Uganda) run a centre with training programmes for environmental conservation and sustainable development.

9. Environmental education in schools³

- School Sisters of Notre Dame (St Louis, USA) have created an Inter-school ecological council to increase environmental awareness.
- Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (New Zealand) have used role play to highlight environmental problems, such as decreasing oil reserves.
- Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Phillipines) have adopted an annual environmental theme: "Care for Life. Care for Mother Earth"
- Hermanas Dominicanas de la Anunciata, Provincia Nuestra Señora del Rosario (Spain), have created a GREEN school: Producing flyers with environmental information; recycling old books; and analyzing the circle of water in the town. Indeed, many religious institutes promote the concept of 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle'.

10. Formation of Environmental Action Groups

- Sisters of St. Martha (Canada) formed the EARTH CIRCLE which does the following: Highlights spiritual reasons for caring for the environment; studies books, articles and songs in relation to the environment; and networks and lobbies with many other groups on particular issues.
- Santísimo Sacramento y María Inmaculada (Spain) formed a group that focuses on: consciousness raising, reforestation programmes and helping teachers and students develop ecological campaigns.
- Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (Chile) carried out a project called GLOBE, which collaborated with the Department of Education in Peru, particularly in raising environmental awareness in primary schools.

11. Eco-Friendly Buildings

- Moniales Dominicaines (Canada) are building a new monastery guided by ecologically sustainable principles.

12. Media

- The Sœurs Missionnaires de l'Immaculée Conception (Canada), have begun putting environmental articles in their magazine.

³ Nearly half of the respondents are involved in this area. Only a few are mentioned here.

13. Use of environmental Video/DVDs

- The Sisters of Christian Charity have watched the film *An Inconvenient Truth* followed by a discussion in order to draw attention to the dangers of climate change.

V. WEBSITES OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES WITH ECOLOGICAL CONTENT

A. English

A centre for education, farming, community building, and spiritual growth: www.sproutcreekfarm.org

Congregation of St. Joseph. Click on 'Peace and Justice': www.sistersofsaintjoseph.org (esp. Amazon)

Society of St. Columban: www.columban.com (links to Columban sites around the world)

Sisters of Charity, Halifax. Enter and click on 'Global Concerns': www.schalifax.ca

Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia: www.themarthas.com (click on 'Ministries' and 'Martha Eco-connect')

Christian Brothers and Edmund Rice Network: <http://www.ecojustice.edmundclt.org/>

Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada. Click on Ecology Committee, MDG's: www.csjfederation.ca

Full Circle Eco-House of Prayer, Port Huron, Michigan, USA: www.fullcycleretreat.org

Kasisi Agricultural Training Center, near Lusaka, Zambia: www.loyno.edu/~katc/

Sisters of St. Joseph of Peterborough: www.csjpeterborough.com/ecology.htm

Intercongregational Franciscan JPIC Working Group, Rome: <http://www.ofm-jpic.org/ecology/index.html>

Society of the Sacred Heart, US and Canadian Provinces: www.sproutcreekfarm.org

Ursulines USA: <http://www.greeningwesternkentucky.org/index.htm>

Society of the Holy Child Jesus, American Province: Booklet on Water for Lent 2008:

<http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/networks/ecology/LentBooklet2008Design.pdf>

Society of Jesus, Oregon, Regional Sustainable Development Plan:

<http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/networks/ecology/Regional%20Sustainable%20Development--Plan%20of%20Action.pdf>

Society of Jesus, India, Solar Alternatives: <http://www.solar-alternatives.com/activities.html>

Earth Healing (AI Frish SJ): <http://www.earthhealing.info/>

Society of Jesus, Latin America, Revista Mirada Global" (English, Spanish and Portuguese)

<http://www.miradaglobal.com/index.php?lang=en>

Eco-Congregation- an ecumenical programme at the service of parishes in UK and Ireland

<http://www.ecocongregation.org/>

Franciscans' JPIC Promoters Ecology Resources on Water and Climate Change

<http://www.ofm.org/ofmnews/ofmorg/00jpic3.php>

B. Portuguesa

Irmãs de São José de Chambéry, França (Brazil):

http://www.issj.com.br//portal/servicos/ambiente/?secao=9541&categoria=18063&hide_id=1

C. Español

Biblioteca Franciscana de Sud America (para una seria de articulos entra la palabra 'ecologia')

<http://www.franciscanos.net/>

Compañía de Jesús, America Latina, Revista Mirada Global: <http://www.miradaglobal.com/>

Fundación Proclade, una Organización no Gubernamental de Desarrollo (ONGD):

www.fundacionproclade.org

VI. CONCLUSIONS

We would like to reiterate that what has been presented is **exclusively based on the responses to the three survey questions** distributed by the Integrity of Creation Working Group of the JPIC Commission.

We conclude with the following points:

- Replies came from all continents.
- Both men and women's religious institutes responded.
- There is a reasonably good variety of involvement by religious in the care for the earth. However, based on the number of responses, it still seems to be pastorally of marginal importance.
- There were some very detailed responses, indicating a strong determination among some institutes to care for the earth.
- Similarly, there were many vague responses, indicating more of a desire to eventually do something.
- Some replies focused more on what needed to be done, rather than what actually is being done.
- Replies were returned in all languages, particularly in English, Spanish, and French and to a lesser degree in Portuguese, Italian and German.
- General and Provincial Chapters tended to include the integrity of creation as an aspect of broader resolutions. Few institutes have made explicit commitments to the integrity of creation.
- Many projects are oriented towards bringing about change locally and within religious communities themselves.
- Based on the responses, numerically few religious are involved at the level of systemic change (lobby work).
- Few respondents are coordinating projects with other groups involved in environmental work including other religious and NGOs.
- Some are implementing governmental environmental programmes, particularly in schools.
- The survey responses highlight some difficulties involved in the distribution and the collection of information at the international level from Rome. It is clear that many religious institutes and individual religious involved in this aspect of ministry never heard about the survey.
- The initial responses provide valuable information for the development of a data base, which eventually will allow religious involved in this ministry to communicate among themselves.
- The survey may encourage those involved to become part of a network in the future.

Rome, October 2008

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Special thanks to John Tiernan - a teacher from Ireland who helped synthesize the information for this report.

VII. APPENDIX 1

Integrity of Creation Survey - List of Religious Institutes

Name of Congregation	Number of respondents
Benedictines	2
Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate	1
Brothers of the Christian Schools	4
Carmelite O.Carm	1
Compañía de María Marianistas	1
Compañía de María para la educación de los Sordomudos	2
Congregación de la mission	1
Congrégation salésienne de la Visitation	1
Divine World Missionaries (SVD)	2
Dominicans	5
Filles de la Charité	1
Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption	1
Franciscans O.F.M.	2
Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus	4
Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus	1
Hermanas de la Caridad Cristiana Hijas de la Bienaventurada Virgen María de la Inmaculada Concepción.	1
Hijas de la pasión de Jesucristo y de María Dolorosa	1
Institut Notre Dame du Bon-Conseil de Montréal	1
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM)	4
Les Sœurs de Sainte Marie de Namur	1
Marist Brothers	1
Medical Mission Sisters	2
Missionary Society of St Columban	5
No name given	4
Pasionista	1
Poor Clares Missionaries	7
Religiosas Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús	11
Scarboro Missions	1
School Sisters of Notre Dame	7

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Schwestern der Christlichen Liebe	3
Servants of the Blessed Sacrament	1
Servants of the holy heart of Mary, USA	2
SFP	1
Sisters of Charity	4
Sisters of Mary Reparatrix	1
Sisters of Providence	2
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peterborough	8
Sisters of St. Martha	2
Society of Jesus	1
Society of the Sacred Heart, US and Canadian Provinces	1
Sœur Anne-Marie Savoie, r.h.s.j	1
Sœurs de la Providence	1
Sœurs de Notre dame du Saint-Rosaire	1
Soeurs du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus	1
Sœurs Missionnaires de l'Immaculée Conception	1
The Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)	3
Union of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	1
Ursulines	2
Zusters Annonciaden van Huldenberg	1

VIII. APPENDIX 2

**Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
USG/UISG Secretariat**

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3.2.08

Integrity of Creation Working Group

**To: Members of Religious Institutes concerned about the environment
From: Integrity of Creation Working Group of the USG/UISG, Rome**

Dear sisters and brothers,

The JPIC Commission of the Conference of Superiors General of men and women's institutes (USG/UISG) recently established a working group for the integrity of creation, composed of members of religious congregations and interested lay people.

The most recent scientific evidence (see Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC – report; www.ipcc.ch) indicates that climate change, very likely caused by human activity, is endangering all life-supporting ecosystems. The Integrity of Creation working group would like to facilitate a deeper appreciation of the centrality of the integrity of creation in evangelization today.

As a first step, we would like to build up a data-base on work being done by religious institutes across the world. This would be a very important resource in encouraging others to take initiatives to care for creation. We propose to make this information widely available via email and the web. We are also interested in sharing and developing ecological educational material suitable for our membership.

We encourage spreading this request to as many people as possible in your congregation. Please ask all people concerned to fill the attached form and send all relevant documents. Any and all can use the attached form. Please attach any documents in electronic format and send them to ecopax9@gmail.com, otherwise, by hard copy to the above address. Please reply in one of the following languages - English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian and if possibly, preferably in English.

We look forward to hearing from you, if possible by March 30, 2008.

In Christ,
Gearóid Francisco Ó Conaire ofm
Secretary General, JPIC Commission of USG/UISG
Member of the Integrity of Creation Working Group.

**Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
USG/UISG Secretariat**

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Integrity of Creation Working Group – information sheet

Name of person _____

Congregation _____

Address _____

E-mail Address(es) _____

Website _____

Principal languages _____

Other languages used _____

Ecology Stances and Projects

- 1) **General and provincial Chapter resolutions**
- 2) **Resources (educational and other) the congregation has developed**
- 3) **Work being done (ecology/environment projects)
(short description, contact information, website address (if any))**

[Add other sheets if necessary]