

Sowing Seeds for the Future

The *JPIC Commission of USG-UISG* promotes and supports the integration of Justice, Peace & integrity of Creation (JPIC) in the life of the members of the *Union of Superior Generals* (USG) and the *International Union of Superior Generals* (UISG). It is responsible for animating the men and women religious in JPIC, according to the evangelical counsels, through experience, social analysis, spiritual reflection and action.

The commission serves individual member Congregations, respecting their own charism, to support greater awareness, and effective action in JPIC matters.

The JPIC Secretariat is accountable for coordinating, animating, and facilitating the mission of the Commission through networking, grassroots organizations, and local/international advocates; providing informed suggestions and reflections; and accompanying JPIC Promoters in their ministry. The focus of

our efforts has been the English and the Spanish and Portuguese promoters. When possible, we add French and Italian. Two executive co-secretaries, a man and a woman religious, manage the Secretariat.

When we share the identity of who we are in the JPIC Secretariat, we use the definition "*JPIC is the conscious prayer and sacred action to transform the world in the spirit of the Gospel through lives of justice, peace and care for the integrity of creation.*" Our role as JPIC Promoters is to respond to the call of Pope Francis, not only listen to the poor and vulnerable, but to support their voice and actively advocate with them for their needs, and to help coordinate and magnify their

voices. We are also called to a ministry of mercy as we advocate for human rights for all persons, and for the rights of the precious and unique creatures of the diverse biomes of our sacred planet Earth.

A life based in prayer nourishes a sacred presence, for we are called to transformation, to move beyond ourselves in light of the Gospel. The life-giving source of prayer needs to be continuously evident in our actions. The importance of a life imbued with the loving presence of Christ is foremost in our awareness. Such a consciousness can be affirmative or invites change. The relationship with Christ is essentially comforting and emanates an irrefutable hope. From this basis, we have the strength to create

new ways of being and the compassion to comfort the fragile world.

To illustrate our journey of sowing seeds for the future, let us begin with the project *Sowing Hope for the Planet*, which seeks to raise

awareness about the urgency of the ecological crisis, to partner with others and to be engaged in planning a response. Much of our efforts going forward is being integrated in this framework. By analogy we see the life of the seed as representative of our journey.

Sowing Hope for the Planet was initiated to offer religious and their connections opportunities to actualize *Laudato Si'* by calling on purposeful action. It offers the opportunity to participate in change and to establish a new and more just integral ecology. In the title of the project, the term "sowing" comes from the well-known biblical parable of the mustard seed from Matthew 13:3-9. Like Christ, we are the sower who



spreads seeds of hope and love. And also, like Christ, we are the seeds being sown, so that we may flower in diverse soils.

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen.
(Luke 8:5-15)

The small and humble seed of the mustard plant can grow into a vigorous tree that becomes an integral member of its ecosystem. Its seeds are some of the smallest of the ancient crops grown in the time of Jesus, but it was grown in every garden. It produces oxygen, absorbs carbon dioxide and helps regulate the water cycle. It provides shelter and nourishment to other creatures. It has also been an important agricultural crop for millennia, providing both food and medicine to people, especially the impoverished, since mustard is easy and inexpensive to grow. The simple mustard plant shows great things can grow from the smallest of beginnings.

We have a task to sow seeds of hope. In the modern world, we are challenged by distractions and misinformation. Our stories are taken out of context and cease to have true meaning. It is imperative that we discern what is true from what is fearfully imagined. We must be honest with ourselves and with others, so the seeds of inspiration will have the best soil to flourish.

In the right soil, the tiny mustard seed grows into a tree, but mustard is a resilient plant which can flourish in a variety of poor soils and once established, it is hard to eradicate. Just like the mustard, the ideas of *Laudato Si'* must be scattered everywhere. Education and inspiration are of paramount importance, we can spread these critical ideas so that they

might flower in the hearts, minds and souls of as many people as possible. For these great trees to grow, as many people as possible must be made aware of the dire problems we and our Sister, Mother Earth are facing. For real change to occur, all people must be involved, rich and poor, north and south, young and old. And once these ideas are spread and take root, it will be difficult to suppress as people become aware that a better way is possible and achievable.

For this reason, it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others.
(FT 196)

Some seeds may be welcomed but not given much thought and so in a short time nothing more happens. Other seeds can be choked by so many cares in the world that they do not receive the light to grow into a viable way of life. But the tiny seeds of the mustard are numerous, and a few seeds open to the movement of the spirit will become fruitful and bear an abundance of receptivity.

In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another". (2014 World Day of Peace; as quoted in FT 96)

The mustard also teaches us that diversity can arise from potential. The mustard is the ancestor to many modern plants that provide nourishment to many peoples - broccoli and bok choy are both descendants of the humble mustard. This plant is an inspiration to us as we follow the ideals of *Laudato Si'* which can bear new fruit to meet the challenges we face. As we take this message to heart, to be sowers of hope, we know that we face the same challenges within ourselves as are projected onto others. If we are to become sowers of hope, we must believe in what we are doing and demonstrate actions that say that we are certainly trustworthy.

The great tree shelters all people and creatures of our precious planet. Like a tree, the Church can shelter and provide education, spreading these vital ideas. The Mother Earth is also a great tree that sustains and supports the diverse biomes and unique biodiversity of this world. The tree which supports us must also be tended and protected.

“The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants”
(Mt 13:31-32; as quoted in LS 97)



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We continue our growth stimulated with the partnerships with the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* and the *Global Catholic Climate Movement*. In our response to the call from Pope Francis to live the reality of *Laudato Si'* we realize: *"Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan."* (LS 164). This way of engaging *Laudato Si'* unifies and develops work of the JPIC Secretariat. With the special observance of the anniversary year of *Laudato Si'*, this work has been accentuated and intensified.

“Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation.” (LS 235)

We continue to be inspired by the *Vision Statement of UISG* which moves us forward in a spirit of transformation with these words change the world.

Vision Statement of UISG

*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.*

This statement was accepted by acclamation at the 2019 UISG Plenary Session. In February 2021 the Executive Council of USG expressed its support for the *Laudato Si' Action Platform* (LSAP) and encouraged all USG member congregations to join forces in a coordinated manner to face this important challenge. The members were also encouraged to coordinate their congregational efforts with *Sowing Hope for the Planet*. It is important to see how working together creates an important dynamic for what we are doing. This serves as a guiding way for our movement with the LSAP.

The work of the *Sowing Hope for the Planet* has developed into this platform and provides the strategic planning for the realization of *Laudato Si'*. *Sowing Hope for the Planet* is a means of coordination both groups.

The *Laudato Si' Action Platform* provides a framework for responding to the urgency of the ecological crisis, enables like-minded partnerships and provides critical planning. We are in the process of creating a tipping point for positive change to the system. We need to be able to do this together.

The overall framework of our work with the LSAP is intended to affirm what has already been done by many congregations and to be flexible. It is in 3 parts: public commitment, making the transition to integral ecology and journeying together.

Congregations are encouraged to develop their commitments based on their charisms and to think in terms of their transition to an integral ecology within 7 years. They are asked to raise their prophetic voice and communicate the commitment to the public and be accountable to the public with regular

reports. Along the way, they are encouraged to find ways to celebrate.

In making the transition to integral ecology they assess their situation in relation to the *Laudato Si'* Goals. With an integrated approach we are attending to the goals of *Laudato Si'*, which are contributing to the critical mass necessary to make a difference. The heart of the LSAP is the seven goals of cry of the Earth, cry of the poor, ecological economics, adoption of sustainable lifestyles, ecological spirituality, ecological education, and community engagement and participatory action. All are interconnected and integral to a sustainable ecology. Members are asked to embed the plan for transition into a community project cycle. Yearly evaluations of the journey will keep track of the progress against set indicators. These goals are steps to help create a just, sustainable and possible future, for all who share this planet, our Sister, Mother Earth.

Finally, the journeying together includes advocacy in global campaigns for integral ecology. Participants are encouraged to join the efforts with a Constellation and to link to the LSAP as well as partner with other communities as in a North / South collaboration.

JPIC Secretariat Services

This frame of reference of the LSAP and the *Pastoral Plan* provides the JPIC approach to involvement with the many issues to which we devote our cause. Since everything is interconnected, it is important to strengthen these efforts and not fragment or isolate our experiences.

We take inspiration from Micah 6:8 “to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with God” in how we live our evangelical counsels. Through poverty we live justly consuming only what is necessary and seek to share the benefits of our resources with everyone, through chastity we find ways to reach out to those in need of love, especially the marginalized and in obedience we walk humbly, listening to the voice of our God.

The engagement in JPIC concerns is characterized by SEE, JUDGE and ACT, an

established methodology used in promoting JPIC efforts. As Christians we realize that, we are *to see with the eyes of Christ, to judge with his compassionate heart, and to act with the transforming strength of this relationship.*

With this method in mind, the function of the JPIC Secretariat is to analyze issues and challenges confronting the world, provide resources and materials on critical subjects and create opportunities for formation and advocacy. Another important function is to provide a platform for religious congregations and their connections with laypeople to promote dialogue and solidarity.

Promoting the ideas of *Laudato Si'* facilitates sharing among the generalates and aids and support for their mutual projects. Networking is an important aspect of our work as we create space for religious organizations, non-governmental organizations and other groups to come together. We also support advocacy and corporate action by the USG/UISG and individual member institutions.

Last December, The JPIC Formation Workshop was presented with over 150 committed and enthusiastic participants who engaged in the five-day workshop "*Engaging Laudato Si'*". The workshop featured the work of 22 presenters. Each day featured discussion themes such as integral ecology, religious life, ministry, encounter and dialogue. The methodology of See (Assess) - Judge (Discern) - Act (Transform) was woven throughout. Catholic social teachings were highlighted in *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* and other church documents. The important work with the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* and the *United Nations* was also interconnected. The participants were challenged with developing an action plan. The plans were shared in a webinar on March 10 which was open for others to gain valuable insights. The upcoming December 2021 will continue online and focus on *Laudato Si'* and the 50th anniversary of the synodal document *Justice in the World*.

We have begun a series related to nonviolence. The recent one, *Building Bridges & Reconciliation Workshop* involved participants who have taken the call from

Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* to engage in dialogue and reconciliation. “*As religious leaders, we are called to be true ‘people of dialogue’, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators.*” (FT 284). This series was developed from the insights and experiences of JPIC Promoters in response to their reflective reading of the encyclical. The series addressed main themes regarding encounter and dialogue in Catholic educational institutions, creative initiatives, nonviolent conflict resolutions, families, communities, and men-women collaborative relationships. This was a collaboration with the *Catholic Nonviolence Initiative*, a project of *Pax Christi International*.

Through social media with various of our programs, we have worked towards a balance of sharing the work of the religious in various countries, in diverse ministries, and in different stages of developments. We included information about major events, international experiences such as the *Conference of the Partners (COP)*, *Synod on the Amazon*, and *World Earth Day*. Honoring the guidance from *Laudato Si’*, the process was recognizing the work of the religious, “*to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.*” (LS 210)

The initiative of *Sowing Hope for the Planet* has led to the development of an interactive project to help our religious to be engaged in different experiences around the globe and so to determine what is possible for them to do. For example, with “*Realizing the Vision of Laudato Si’*” we visited the UISG Middle East Constellation which featured recent developments from Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Iraq with an inspiring and informative presentation of their congregation’s actions in Lebanon. They have been active in many projects including education, reforestation and agriculture, aiding the poor and promoting the ideas of *Laudato Si’*. The webinar concluded with a beautiful video sung by local children. It was truly amazing and inspiring to see the seeds of hope sown in that country, especially in light of the tragedy in Beirut. It was beautiful to witness the vital

signs of life in this country of rich heritage. The videos of the event is available on the [Planet Hope YouTube Channel](#).

Another webinar, “*Do Something*” October 22, 2020, acknowledged that the ecological crisis was a moral crisis. Various congregations shared their efforts to organize their work with their congregations building on the need to address consumerism and offer educational opportunities that made a difference in our care of the planet.

In other ways, an event for the Africa West C7 Constellation was well received, especially for the Francophone members who have been requesting more materials. An engaging presentation was given which described their work to create networks in the field of education, orphanages, boarding schools and health. For the education network they offered a training session for educators on nonviolence and an action on the environment in 2019 in Abidjan.

In another collaborative session, sisters from France presented their Congregations commitment to *Laudato Si’* ideals by socially responsible investing, ecological initiatives such as a gardening projects to grow vegetables, yogurt, raising ecological awareness in schools to reduce waste, support climate activism, cleaning plastic garbage from the environment and recycling.

A Worldwide Prayer and Sacred Action event that involve constellations from Africa South, Asia Pacific, South Asia, Rome, Africa West, Brazil, Mexico and the USA. With the Season of Creation theme “*The Jubilee for the Earth*” we prayerfully visited eight of our constellations and affirmed the sacred actions taking place in these countries. Entering into their reality, we listened to the cries of Earth and the poor. Opportunities were given for the participants to send personal prayers and bless each constellation. Many experiences were shared in different contexts: migration, importance of clean and healthy environments and ways to minimize pollution, and the vulnerable being trafficked. We also saw the efforts of each constellation

struggling to maintain the unique beauty of each area.

Due to our fruitfulness—the experience and growth of this project *Sowing Hope for the Planet* — we have made several contributions in the development of the *Laudato Si' Action Platform* of the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*. In this way, we continue to raise our prophetic voice in the church and the world. Many men and women religious are already making an impact with this is a platform opportunity to systematize and organize our efforts. The process of our involvement respects different starting points, various situations, and the unique charisms and methodologies of the congregations. In fact, the way the congregations may organize themselves and develop their commitment to integral ecology may be very diverse.

We have been active members of the *Laudato Si' Steering Board* and of the *Integral Ecology Task Force* of the *COVID Commission*. We have made important contributions to significant areas of discussion “Diagnosis of the Roots of the Crisis of Ecology”, “Ecological Conversion in Action”, “The two Pillars of Education and Spirituality Influence Finance”, “Integral Ecology & the Voices of the Vulnerable”, “Integral Ecology and Mining”, and “Plastic Waste and COVID”. Catechetical Contributions related to solidarity and the common destination of goods. The March paper considered bio-diversity.

There are JPIC Promoter working groups such as the African Working Group which hosted a webinar to raise awareness of the importance of advocacy work in Africa. The webinar in English with French translation was very well attended by JPIC coordinators in Rome and in Africa. AEFJN is a faith based international network dedicated to economic justice between the European Union and Africa South of Sahara through advocacy. Many religious congregations are members of AEFJN and they network through their communities and join with other civil society groups to advocate for a respectful compassionate world. The network also lobbies decision makers at the national level,

helping Africans be the main advocates for economic justice.

Another promoter session discussed the practical use of the Pastoral Cycle. The purpose was to focus on social analysis of the misuse of plastics, using the methodology: See (Assess), Judge (Discern), Act (Transformation). The participants were engaged in a step-by-step guide that explains both the transformative dynamics involved and the practical tools of facilitation. This included pastoral guidance for social transformation working with grassroots groups and communities.

Other sessions have focused on the reflections of the Vatican documents for *World Day of Peace, Refugees and Migrants, Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si'*.

The JPIC Commission supports two websites, jpicroma.org - sowinghopefortheplanet.org, which provide many resources for JPIC promoters, religious and laypersons. The JPIC Roma website is in English and Spanish. JPIC Roma publishes a News brief which provides more in-depth reflection and analysis of timely events and includes some practical tools for JPIC Promoters to use for their own presentations.

The *Sowing Hope for the Planet* website provides current events and news for advocates, along with resources that may be posted by participants who have contributed much of their work to realizing *Laudato Si'* goals. The website is posted in English, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Resource areas include *Laudato Si' Action Plans*, Season of Creation, water, refugees & migration, the Amazon and sustainability among many others. The website also features a map tool of the Constellations, their responses to the Plenary on the needs of their countries and the commitments they have made to address those needs. *Sowing Hope for the Planet* also hosts a regular Newsletter with updates with what is happening in advocacy regarding Rome and the world. Additionally, we have a YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/PlanetHope>, which provides access to recorded webinars and resource videos and a

Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/sowinghopefortheplanet/> which provides a public space for outreach and networking.

The JPIC Secretariat has begun to use an educational platform for hosting its interactive sessions for its courses: the JPIC Formation Workshop, Building Bridges and Reconciliation and the Laudato Si' for Promoters. This provides more privacy for materials and participants who join our programs and help us to connect to one another. Connections and dialogue are facilitated in the Discussion section, where experiences and contact information can be shared in such a way as to invite conversation and facilitate the exchange of ideas and information. The platform also offers us a dedicated way to organize our resources in an easily accessible format. Resources can include written documents as well as videos. We can also offer resources in multiple languages to continue our commitment to inclusivity. This new platform is an exciting opportunity to share access to important and relevant information. It allows us to schedule and organize programs and meetings as needed to further develop resources. We can provide a space for participants to network, share, dialogue and form communities around their mutual ideas.

Efforts for the Future

In working towards the future, we attend to the pastoral plan of Pope Francis, established by *four principles* in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

1. **“time is greater than space”,**
2. **“unity prevails over conflict”,**
3. **“reality is more important than ideas”,**
4. **“the whole is better than the part”.**

In the first principle of "time is greater than space" we state that continuity is built into our experiences and that we have the intention of ongoing growth and development. By bringing together persons who share our common vision for the well-being of all creation, we can strive to find ways to responsibly promote a new reality.

In the second, "Unity prevails over conflict", we feel that by grounding our strengths for social concerns and our caring religious

traditions with expert analysis, we can unify our efforts to work together for the good of all humanity. It encourages us to look for ways to broaden our concerns and seek areas for interconnection.

With "reality is more important than ideas", we share our journeys with people who suffer deprivation of basic human rights—food, water, health, work, and the destruction of our planet—we are carefully addressing these experiences so that we can determine ways we can make a difference in our world. We explore in a deeper way the root causes of the pain. We ask difficult questions from a broader and more comprehensive perspective, not only why are people poor, but why are people rich? As religious, we can ask these questions with our members.

"The whole is better than the part" shows that in this process, we do not want to leave anyone behind in our work. Thus, the multicultural experience highlights the gifts shared by many countries. We are building a sustainable road map, honoring clear commitments and plans to develop an integrated and sustainable ecology. These support us with hope as we respond to Pope Francis's words:

“What we need, then is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events, without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity.” (E.G. 223)
“So, we move forward together in solidarity with one another because we are all in this common home, our precious Sister, Mother Earth. We are sharing the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time, important and needed. We are being called to row together, comforting each other in this voyage we take together.” (Urbi et Orbi Blessing April 3, 2020).

Sowing Hope for the Planet is an urgent call for a new integral ecology that demands a deep response. We will continue with our plans to actualize the *Laudato Si Platform* in the lives of religious congregations. The series on nonviolence will also look at ways to promote peace.

As a leader in the Religious Sector of the *Laudato Si' Action Platform* our plans are to actualize, coordinate and collaborate with our religious and other partners as we respond:

1. The Cry of the Earth: by a greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels in order to achieve carbon neutrality, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, guaranteeing access to clean water for all, etc..
2. The Cry of the Poor: by defending of human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants, children at risk through slavery, etc..
3. Ecological Economics: by supporting sustainable production, Fair-trade, ethical consumption, ethical investments, and by divestment from fossil fuels and any economic activity harmful to the planet and the people, but by investing in renewable energy, etc..
4. Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles: through sobriety in the use of resources and energy, avoiding single-use plastic, adopting a more plant-based diet and reduce meat consumption, greater use of public transport and avoiding polluting modes of transportation, etc..
5. Ecological Education: through re-thinking and re-designing educational curricula and educational institution reform in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action, and by promoting the ecological vocation of young people, teachers and leaders of education etc..
6. Ecological Spirituality: by recovering a religious vision on God's Creation, encouraging greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy and gratitude, and promoting creation-centered liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats, formation, etc..
7. Emphasis on Community involvement and participatory action: to care for creation at the local, regional, national and international levels (promoting advocacy and people's campaigns, encouraging rootedness in local territory and neighborhood ecosystems).

We will continue on the LSSB and the Integral Ecology Task for the COVID Commission to help prepare a future with the realism that only the Gospel can give. This is an opportunity to be with a professional, compassionate, committed leadership from around the globe.

Like the sower from the parable, we are spreading the seeds of the ideas and concepts of *Laudato Si'*. We continue to carry forward all of the opportunities to promote the *Laudato Si Action Platform* which includes commitment to an ecological sustainable lifestyle.

We are also the mustard seed, that will grow into a diverse and strong network of life that will provide support and sustenance to the vulnerable. It has become our duty to grow and spread these seeds so that they may flower in the hearts and minds of as many people as possible. The identity of *the JPIC Office* is rooted in conscious prayer and sacred action. The planet has suffered from misuse and mismanagement and it will require the spirit of the Gospel to heal. It calls to us to live lives that honor and care for the integrity of all creation, especially the vulnerable whose voices may not be heard. As we follow Pope Francis, we must join their active advocacy in establishing basic, inalienable, human rights for every person. This justice must also extend to the precious biomes and our irreplaceable mother, the Earth. A prayer-based life, with its sacrifices and strengths, is uniquely positioned to be a pillar of strength in this struggle. The presence of Christ will sustain us as we create new and more just ways of being and seeking positive, constructive change to heal and comfort our suffering world. Like the sower, we will spread the seeds of a future based upon love and justice. Like the humble mustard seeds, we must grow into vigorous networks that protect and nurture the vulnerable. We must show by example that a positive, equitable and sustainable world is possible and attainable, if only we all work together.