

An integral **ECOLOGY**

**MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMISSION OF MARIST MISSION**



WHERE ARE WE ON THIS JOURNEY!

We, the Marists of Champagnat, are committed to the care of our common home.¹

This text is an invitation to reflection and to action. It will help us to evaluate our Christian and Marist tradition and will encourage us to continue to take firm and practical steps for the benefit of our Mother Earth and all of creation, with special emphasis on circumstances and our brothers and sisters are most vulnerable.²

In many circles, fortunately, we can perceive an increasing sensitivity to the theme of ecology. We unite ourselves with the approach which Pope Francis proposes in the encyclical *Laudato Si*³, called an “integral ecology”, which incorporates both human and social dimensions.⁴ Care for life cannot separate human beings from the way in which they live, given that both realities are related and mutually enrich and help each other. An excessive and irrational preoccupation for human well-being can destroy the means by which

1 *Message of the XXII General Chapter*, 5th call.

2 In this article, when we use the term “vulnerable”, we intend to signify how it has come to be understood in the Marist world, that is to say, in a wide and inclusive sense..

3 Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, of Pope Francis, 2015.

4 Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, 137, Pope Francis, 2015.



General Chapter - 2017

we live. It can establish a boomerang effect which turns against us, such as we are witnessing today.

In number 49 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis explains with striking words that “a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*”. (An idea which is repeated in the exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, 8.) His predecessor, Benedict XVI, also had spoken about the close relationship of “the ecology of nature...human ecology ... and social ecology”⁵.

Our desire to care for life brings us to generate new life⁶. We care for the life of our brothers in community, of our families, our children⁷ and young people. During this time of pandemic, we discover especially that the whole of life is interconnected, that what occurs in one small corner of the planet affects other places in the world. It is no longer sufficient to go along with the old idea that “each person is responsible for his or her own life”. We are responsible for the lives of all other people, both those who are near and those who are far away; we are responsible for the life of nature.

⁵ Message for the World Day of Peace, 8, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007

⁶ Circular from Br. Ernesto Sánchez, *Homes of Light*, 2020.

⁷ When we use the word “children”, we are referring to both boys and girls as well as adolescents.



God is concerned for all of creation (Mt. 6, 25-31): the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, all human beings. Of course, at times we encounter ideas that suggest only the human being is of value. The change which integral ecology proposes takes us to a place where we feel ourselves to be in communion with the whole of nature, with the whole of creation. Integral ecology invites us to live and work for the present and the future of creation. God has entrusted each human being with two precious and specific characteristics: freedom and intelligence. Freedom is to be able to choose the “right path”. Intelligence is to propose the necessary requirements for the journey. Dr. Jane Goodall⁸ invites us to reflect about this point of choosing the right path and the necessary requirements in life’s journey.

The Message of the XXII General Chapter is also very clear in this respect and refers to the necessary elements for living and transmitting our commitment to an integral ecology, responding to the necessities of our world and of our brothers and sisters who live in it. It is us, Marists of Champagnat, to bear witness to this message, no matter our age, nationality or capacity.

WE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN!

Within the Institute there already exist many initiatives working towards an integral ecology. Concrete actions vary according to places, means, situations and people. There are initiatives at the local level, as well as programmes and projects at the level of Administrative Units, in the General Administration, and at the level of the whole Institute. In recent years, we have worked on the theme of awareness, and without a doubt, our point of view has undergone a change and come closer to that proposed by integral ecology.

Awareness

Our participation in groups of reflection, in networks and organisations with a clear ecological outlook, community and provincial proposals, participation in conferences are some ways to grow in this area.

There are an increasing number of local, national and international calls for the care of our common home which demonstrate a growing interest to incorporate the integral ecological perspective into our daily life. The calls of our most recent General Chapter have been incorporated into the strategic plans

⁸ Dra. Jane Goodall, Biodiversity Webinar: The road to COP15, 20 de abril 2021.



of various Administrative Units and the General Administration. Clearly, these are signs of the urgency of this significant theme.

Some Administrative Units have set out ambitious plans for the development of integral



Brazil

ecology, both at the provincial and local levels. Conferences, webinars, reflection groups, presentations are marked down in the calendars of many of us. We are assisted by provincial or regional teams, as well as by local sources.

The General Administration is also making important efforts to be present in reflection groups. The project “Laudato Si Action Platform”, the reflection and co-ordination of the four branches of the Marist Family, and the inclusion of recommendations of an ecological character in political advocacy all form part of the steps which have been taken.

It is an awareness that is growing within us and in our communities and families, as well as in our mission (in our educational centres and apostolates).

Networking

Our world, becoming ever more a global culture, calls to us to collaborate with others, to participate and propose points for reflection and action. One of the activities is participation in networks to defend our common home. These networks allow us to create the “critical mass”, that is to say, a significant group of people who help us to change the way we understand our relationship with nature and the implications that this has for us.

There are local, provincial and regional proposals, which, taken together with others, are moving us from reflection to action. Participation in movements like the Laudato Si Movement (LSM)⁹, JPIC¹⁰, “Sowing Hope for the Plan-

⁹ Global Catholic Climate Movement.

¹⁰ Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.



Superiors General of the Marist Family

these things show that we are taking seriously the care of nature and respect for human beings.

Education

Today we have educational and academic projects which are helping new generations of children and young people to become aware and to act to give an answer to the ecological emergency in which we find ourselves. Also, within pastoral groups, this theme is becoming ever more important. We remember, as an example, groups of scouts who are present within our educational apostolates. Historically they have a significant sensitivity to this theme, both about reflection and activity.

As Marists of Champagnat, we desire to continue encouraging young people towards an active participation in the care of our common home. We want to give them the leadership they deserve and which they are ready to exercise.

et” are some of the networks in which the various Administrative Units have begun to participate in certain countries. On many occasions, it is not only a case of participating but of exercising an authentic leadership (REPAM = Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network: EPU = Environment Protection Unit; LSAP= Laudato Si Action Platform).

Our collaboration with organizations of civil society, presence in governmental institutions, and participation in advocacy at the international level is evident.

The inclusion of ecology has become an important element of our own provincial, regional and institutional networks. All

Let us take steps so that the concerns and hopes are reflected in the Marist educational apostolates.

We want to offer an education that is integral because it includes the care of our common home, which leads to putting into practice concrete projects. We desire an integral education which furnishes children and young people with the necessary tools to give real answers to the needs of our day and to help them go out from themselves to insert themselves as full, actively participating members in their societies. An integral education assists everyone to form part of our educational communities: children and young people, families and educators, those who work in ancillary roles as well as all those who encounter our works. We want to bring about change to transform society into one which is more respectful and fraternal.¹¹

Initiatives

We want to recognize the value of hundreds of practical initiatives which we are developing throughout the Marist world. There are local and provincial initiatives. Some are small and some are very large; there are personal initiatives and group initiatives. Administrative Units, regions, our NGO and foundations, the General Administration are taking real steps to place them-

¹¹ Cf. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, 17, of Pope Francis, 2020.



Bilbao - Spain



Puerto Rico

selves on the side of those who are suffering in our common home, the most vulnerable and those who are most affected by natural disasters.

Practical initiatives like the change of the electrical system, the installation of generators providing clean energy, buying vehicles that contaminate the planet less, care of our orchards and gardens, all of these give evidence of our commitment. Educating to save energy, turning off lights and taps, not wasting food, using less plastic, reduce, recycle and re-use have increasing importance for our lives.

Activities which allow contact which is in harmony with nature are very much encouraged. The description of alternative ways of life which encourage care for nature and the poorest people have become habitual themes in our dialogue. The practice of recycling and using paper in the best way, the use of re-usable bottles, the installation of sources of “clean” energy, and the celebration of international days on the environment remind us of the need for ecological care.

Pastoral care of the young is always developing this theme, with prayers, formal and informal talks, reading documents together, activities and excursions which have a clear ecological thrust. Everything helps and they all add up.

Communities and families, Marist groups, bursars, local and provincial

teams, inter-departmental meetings are all ways that help us take concrete action. Each one of us has a responsibility and we are beginning to exercise it.

In all these initiatives, our Marist charism, offers us some help for the journey including the spirit of family, respect for others, care for life, the Gospel use of goods, integral education.

TAKE CARE WITH CARE!

Following the path of integral ecology presents some major challenges to us as Christians and Marists of Champagnat. Marcellin knew how to confront the great challenges which he met in his own time and his own society. We too are called to respond to the emerging needs of our own world. As the XXII General Chapter reminds us, we are already taking steps which will lead us to a meaningful and audacious response.

Care for our common home

To speak of integral ecology implies that we recognize our world, including all that has been created, as our common home. This is a recognition that must be active, it must lead us to care for it, to respect it, and to help it along. We are convinced that every little action can be useful. Earlier we described some concrete initiatives and actions which help towards a greater awareness and encourage practical interventions.

Care for creation implies action in the present, but it also means repairing the damage in the past. It affects our daily life, but it can also offer a future of opportunities for generations to come. All of this implies action. To care for, admire and respect nature, its beauty, the life that we encounter in it, must be a daily reality for us and not just extraordinary moments during our daily work.

Care that heals, that repairs and cleans up the wounds that have been inflicted must be a care that respects, that protects particularly that which is discovered to be in a very delicate situation. This is a kind of care which brings us to generate more life, new life, a full life and includes people who live in every society and is developed alongside people from local communities.



Care for people, particularly those who are most vulnerable

Pope Francis reminds us that the care for the earth, our mother, must be strictly connected to care for people, particularly the most vulnerable ones. Caring for people is a priority in our Institute. Br. Ernesto reminded us of some months ago in his circular “Homes of Light” to care for people, especially those most in need, the poor, the abandoned, the excluded and those who suffer most from the consequences of natural disasters, from floods and droughts, and from the effects of lack of water and food.

This type of care begins with leading a simple life, in relation to and in harmony with nature, a personal and community style of life, both in families and as institutions. Perhaps we could dare to say that the slogan “good Christians and good citizens” implies both dimensions, that is care for nature and care for other people.

Just as we cannot disconnect human beings from their life situation, so we cannot separate our being Marists from the care of whomever we encounter that is in need. We cannot divide our personal life and our mission. If we manage to keep these separate, possibly we would no longer be faithful to our Christian and Marist vocation.

Care for education

As Marists of Champagnat, we have a major responsibility in the world of education. Hundreds of educational works (schools, social works, universities) serve hundreds of thousands of children, adolescents and young people, in the five continents. This presupposes a major involvement in our world.

Educational plans which promote care for the environment, and which create an awareness of ecological issues, which awaken sensitivity towards situations of need, which equip young people with the tools to respond to emerging realities and programs which sow seeds of life are most needed.

Our education, as Marists, goes beyond the academic content and introduces the Gospel perspective. It promotes and develops spiritual intelligence which widens the awareness and the responsibility towards those around us. It a spirituality which becomes concrete in the cry of the brother¹² who is suffering, in the cry of the earth in its fragility, a spirituality which reflects and moves towards action, and a spirituality which can discover the beauty of the

¹² Often in this document, the word “brother” is used to include brothers and sisters.





United States

whole of God’s creation, and which knows how to be grateful for the gift of life, of nature and of every human being, our brother or sister.

It is an education which entrusts leadership to new generations, walking with them, guiding and preparing them on the journey of life. It is an integral education which rejects “the throw away culture”¹³ and moves towards “the culture of encounter”¹⁴. To sum up, it is an education which “strives to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and the relationship with nature”¹⁵.

Caring for the future, without forgetting the present

Future generations and the future of our home must be in our present reflection and our action. We cannot look only at the existing reality. Our current

13 This is an expression which is often used by Pope Francis in different places and occasions. See the encyclical *Laudato Si*, 16, of Pope Francis, 2015.

14 This is also a phrase often used by Pope Francis. See the Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, of Pope Francis, 2020, in various articles: 30, 215, 216, 217, 232. See also *For a culture of encounter*, meditation of Pope Francis on September 13, 2016.

15 Encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, 215, of Pope Francis, 2015.

reality must be addressed, and our actions must be directed towards the repair of the present fragile state of nature and the social injustices which many of our brothers and sisters are suffering because of it.

The programs and projects must be directed towards the future, educating generations of children and young people, who will become a vast group of agents for the politics of the care of nature and of the most vulnerable. This is a future which is already present, given the urgency to take steps which will change the present movement towards the self -destruction of planet earth.

The wellbeing of our planet is a conditioning element of the development of the whole human being, a development that is human, given that we all form part of “the global family”, the great human family. A development which is integral will stimulate all the areas of life: our relationship with nature, our relationship with our brothers and sisters and our relationship with God.

NOW WHAT?

Within the General Administration

The General Administration continues to encourage this theme, prioritizing it on all levels, in collaboration with others, internally as well as externally. It is necessary that the General Administration encourage, co-ordinate, evaluate and be examples of concrete action. It is necessary for us to be brave and “to preach by example”.

We need to encourage networking, developing an area of dynamic and integrated ecology in the different departments and secretariats. We need to work with other groups in the Church and in society, with local organizations and worldwide movements.

Our reflections, communications and actions must be infused with care for our planet and for our brothers and sisters. We find ourselves confronted with a theme which cuts across all the issues that face us and can and must be present in all the aspects of our life.

In the Regions and Administrative Units

We help and support the initiatives which are being developed at the level of the whole Institute. Also, the various activities which are going on can be



collected, evaluated, and encouraged. New initiatives can be set in motion, seeking the participation of those involved in a variety of activity.

For this we require structures and funds, and especially people who will work in a determined fashion for the care of our world. Working together with other organizations, being part of reflection groups, developing concrete initiatives must be part of the daily life of our Provinces and Regions.

In our own local situation

To be capable of developing policies as well as tangible actions which bring us close to people with whom we share life and mission, we need to begin with small changes, at times seemingly insignificant, which start to change our habitual ways of acting. These will make us witnesses of the beauty and the fragility of creation. Everyone has much to give including the brother in his community life and in his ministry, the lay people in their family life and their work, the children and young people in their reflection and action.

Effective measures

This article does not present a list of effective measures which we can apply. There are hundreds of these and all of them can be good. Each one of us, individually and as an institution, must be creative, seeing which measures are the best in our own context. We need to reflect on the resources we can

rely on and use our imagination as to how to involve more and more people. We have been pointing out some ideas as we have gone along in this reflection on Integral Ecology. This document is a concrete initiative, intended to help our reflection, to increase our awareness and to encourage us to continue what we have been doing in those parts of the Institute which have been following this path for years, or to begin whereas yet no steps have been taken on the journey towards Integral Ecology.

Let us remember the three verbs which we have mentioned: reduce, recycle and re-use. We can put these into practice in all our educational works, in our communities, families and in our own neighborhoods.

FOR EXAMPLE...

Laudato Si Action Platform: This is a project begun by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, an initiative of Pope Francis. The task of this department is to encourage action throughout the whole of society at all levels.

Following the encyclical *Laudato Si*, promulgated in 2015, the Pope and the dicastery invite us to take an active part in the project, each one in his or her own setting.



Philippines

This project has seven objectives for a period of seven years and with seven groups working on them. The seven objectives are closely related to the Objectives for Sustainable Development proposed by the United Nations to be accomplished before 2030. The period of seven years stresses the urgency to start on the journey to respond to the urgent need of our planet. The seven coordinating



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Action Platform

groups try to make a place for everyone and help them to participate in this project starting from their own situation.

All the information can be found at <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>. There we can find all the details in order to know more about this project. The General Administration is involved in one of the seven working groups, which covers religious congregations.

On the website we receive a direct invitation to participate because caring for our brothers and sisters means to care for the home we share. This responsibility “is essential to a life of virtue” (*Laudato Si*, 217). The Laudato Si Action Platform of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is a space where institutions, communities and families can learn and grow together.¹⁶

FROM HERE ON, IT'S UP TO US.

Pope Francis, in his recent apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*¹⁷, reminds us of the importance of ordinary people like St. Joseph: Our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people who in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history?” Are we not ordinary people who desire to help to change our world?

The International Marist Commission for Mission would like to invite you to take an active part in the events of our history and of the future. Of course, we are aware of our own weakness, but we know that it is precisely

¹⁶ Tomado de la página web <https://plataformadeaccionlaudatosi.org/>, 30 de septiembre 2021.

¹⁷ Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, of Pope Francis, on the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, 2020



here that God likes to work. St. Joseph, patron of the Marist Institute, our Good Mother and St. Marcellin, are great examples of how God acts in human weakness.

As Pope Francis reminds us, we desire “to build networks of solidarity and development”¹⁸ which are focused on those who are most in need and on the natural world which so often is maltreated and which brings us ever closer to the global family, which the Marists of Champagnat desire to be.

It is for us “to abandon the culture of our egos and promote the ideas which reduce the scandal of indifference and of inequality”. In this way, will be awakened “an ecological awareness which involves us in the care of our common home”¹⁹.

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In the name of the International Marist Commission for Mission

18 Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, 17, of Pope Francis, 2020.

19 The two quotations are taken from the *Message of the XXII General Chapter*, 3rd call.

If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email fms.cimm@fms.it

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