

SUGGESTIONS OF ACTIONS FOR A WAY OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN CONGREGATION

We are called to be the “incarnation” of God's love wherever we are, but especially for the most disadvantaged. And today, “earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.” LS, N°2.

After the publication of the *Laudato Si*, integral ecology is evidenced as the way of being and proceeding in the Church. The Latin American bishops remind us: "The approach of Integral Ecology that underlies the heart of this encyclical of Pope Francis must be assumed by the whole Church, as a constitutive dimension of the evangelizing task" (Apostolic Exhortation of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean “Custodian Missionary Disciples of the Common House. Discernment in the light of the *Laudato Si*”, N° 135).

Everything is interconnected, in nature and in our very being. We are one. Therefore, non-harmony in one of the parts affects the whole. *Laudato Si* is clear: “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” LS N ° 139.

In the desire that integral ecology be the central axis of the congregation, we will examine its’ six dimensions: environmental, economic, social, cultural, spiritual and our daily lives, through the lens of LS.

Environmental dimension.

Foundation.

LS N° 21: “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.”

LS N° 22: “These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish. To cite one example, most of the paper we produce is thrown away and not recycled. It is hard for us to accept that the way natural ecosystems work is exemplary: plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants. But our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them. A serious consideration of this issue would be one way of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet, but it must be said that only limited progress has been made in this regard.”

LS N°211: “There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can

encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.”

LS N°89: “We can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement.”

Actions.

At the general level:

- ✓ The houses and institutions we own must be governed by the principle of sustainability: zero waste, clean energy, etc. This refers, as well to the phases of construction, maintenance and use¹.
- ✓ Hold sustainable celebrations, minimizing the consumption of energy, water and natural resources necessary for execution, and reducing as much as possible the generation of greenhouse gas emissions, wastewater discharges and household and hazardous waste.
- ✓ Requiring companies that provide us with supply chain monitoring systems, to ensure that the products they buy, create or sell are produced in a socially and environmentally sustainable way².
- ✓ In order to reduce the carbon footprint of air travel, consider replacing some face-to-face meetings with meetings through the web.
- ✓ As a means of off-setting the inevitable CO2 emissions, collaborate in the maintenance of forests by supporting tree reforestation projects carried out by NGOs.

At the community level:

- ✓ Own as few vehicles as possible.
- ✓ Use public transportation.
- ✓ If possible, use clean energy in the house. Minimize waste, and responsibly manage the inevitable.
- ✓ Hold sustainable celebrations.
- ✓ Collaborate in local reforestation initiatives.
- ✓ Claim public support for the rural environment.

At personal level:

- ✓ Reject throw-away products and discard those goods with unnecessary packaging.

Economic dimension.

¹ At <http://www.greenfaith.org/programs> there is a good example of interfaith work to organize “green” convents and seminars.

² Final document Synod of the Amazon, N° 77.

Foundation.

LS N° 16. A new optic is necessary. “As examples, I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.”

LS N°190: “It should always be kept in mind that “environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces”.”

LS N°191: “We need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development.”

LS N°193: “If in some cases sustainable development were to involve new forms of growth, in other cases, given the insatiable and irresponsible growth produced over many decades, we need also to think of containing growth by setting some reasonable limits and even retracing our steps before it is too late. We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That **is why the time has come to accept decreased growth** in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.”

LS N°52: “The foreign debt of poor countries has become a way of controlling them, yet this is not the case where ecological debt is concerned. In different ways, developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future. The land of the southern poor is rich and mostly unpolluted, yet access to ownership of goods and resources for meeting vital needs is inhibited by a system of commercial relations and ownership which is structurally perverse. The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development. The poorest areas and countries are less capable of adopting new models for reducing environmental impact because they lack the wherewithal to develop the necessary processes and to cover their costs. We must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities.”

LS N°172: “For poor countries, the priorities must be to eliminate extreme poverty and to promote the social development of their people. At the same time, they need to acknowledge the scandalous level of consumption in some privileged sectors of their population and to combat corruption more effectively. They are likewise bound to develop less polluting forms of energy production, but to do so they require the help of countries which have experienced great growth at the cost of the ongoing pollution of the planet. Taking advantage of abundant solar energy will require the establishment of mechanisms and subsidies which allow developing countries access to technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources, but in a way which respects their concrete situations, since “the compatibility of [infrastructures] with the context for which they have been designed is not always adequately assessed”. The costs of this would be low, compared to the risks of climate change. In any event, these are primarily ethical decisions, rooted in solidarity between all peoples.”

To sustain you have to decrease. The necessary decrease must be a constant horizon especially in rich countries, where a standard of living that is not sustainable by not being universalizable is normalized. We can only talk about integral development if it does not harm future generations.

Actions.

At the general level:

- ✓ Ethical banking.
- ✓ Divestment in fossil fuels and other businesses harmful to life and the environment.
- ✓ Investment in clean energy in our communities. In less developed countries, active congregational economic support.
- ✓ Property management under the principle of social solidarity, avoiding any kind of speculation.
- ✓ Pay attention to the source of donations or other kinds of benefits, to avoid being complicit in unfair structures or attitudes³.
- ✓ At the level of international solidarity, support projects with an ecological perspective, whether in education, production...⁴
- ✓ Combat capitalist impoverishment strategies; against the feminization of poverty, support micro-projects headed by women.

At the community level:

- ✓ Discern how we can decrease community consumption, nurture the motivations to do it with joy, and help each other to carry it out.

At personal level:

- ✓ Each one to discern how she can consume less, thereby leading her to live more freely and in solidarity.

Social dimension.

Foundation.

LS N°49: "Today, however, we have to realize 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."

LS N°142: "Social ecology is necessarily institutional, and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities."

LS N°159: "The notion of the common good also extends to future generations (...) We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity (...) Intergenerational solidarity is not

³ Apostolic Exhortation "Querida Amazonía" N°25: "Put "special attention to the source of donations or other benefits, as well as to investments made by ecclesiastical institutions or Christians."

⁴ LS N°180: "Agriculture in poorer regions can be improved through investment in rural infrastructures, a better organization of local or national markets, systems of irrigation, and the development of techniques of sustainable agriculture."

optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.”

LS N°231: “Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones” (...) In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us.”

LS N°219: **“Social problems must be addressed by community networks.”**

LS N°179: “Because the enforcement of laws is at times inadequate due to corruption, public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment. Local legislation can be more effective, too, if agreements exist between neighbouring communities to support the same environmental policies.”

LS N°158: “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”

LS N°232: “Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban... These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.”

Actions.

At the general level:

- ✓ Participation in international instances, Church or civil, which work for social justice and equality. Example: UISG, International Network against Human Trafficking, etc.

At the community level:

- ✓ Practice the analysis of reality and cultivate a critical way of thinking.
- ✓ Participation in local or national associations that work in the promotion of social justice and equality.
- ✓ Claiming quality public services.
- ✓ Use and promotion of public services (health, transportation, etc.).

- ✓ Together with others, participate in advocacy actions for the adoption of social and ecological policies.
- ✓ Promote the culture of welcoming, both in the community and in associations, especially towards the most disadvantaged.
- ✓ Join or promote associations that promote ecological actions⁵.
- ✓ Participate in the revitalization of social justice and ecology within the congregation.

At personal level:

- ✓ Permanent formation in reality's analysis and solidarity involvement.

Cultural dimension.

Foundation.

LS N°111: "Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system."

LS N°143: "Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense (...) Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment."

LS N°144: "There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes an historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture."

LS N°145: "The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal."

Missionary Disciples Custodians of the Common Home N° 58: "Faced with the serious ecological crisis, the growing global warming of the planet's surface temperature and climate change, which in their extreme effects endanger human survival on earth, we are called to discern our place as human beings in creation and our responsibility for it, because this crisis at the bottom is a cultural and spiritual crisis."

Education and health without cultural belonging is another form of colonization.

⁵ LS N°179: "In some places, cooperatives are being developed to exploit renewable sources of energy which ensure local self-sufficiency and even the sale of surplus energy. This simple example shows that, while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference."

Final Document of the Amazonian Synod N° 51: "Christ with the incarnation left his prerogative of God and became man in a concrete culture to identify with all humankind. Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in indigenous cultures ("what is not assumed is not redeemed", San Ireneo, cf. Puebla 400) and at the same time the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. In this process the peoples are protagonists and accompanied by their agents and pastors."

Interculturality

Baptism is the sacrament of interculturality. The Catholic Church is called to the art of listening to the whole and creating space for the new. The unity in diversity is very significant.

Importance of language

Language includes what it says, so it is so important to be aware of and use constructive and inclusive language.

Constructive: for example, let's talk about "creation goods" and not "natural resources" (this expression is itself possessive); instead of "fighting violence", let's talk about "dismantling violence" (not reproducing the chain of violence in language).

Inclusive: words have an enormous power to evoke collective conceptions and behaviours. They model our way of thinking, understanding and believing. The fact that unnamed women appear in the Christian community (in the liturgy, in official texts ...), has reinforced the presence, and therefore, the dominance of one sex over the other. The use of inclusive language is an imperative of justice.

Actions.

At the general level:

- ✓ Promote training and intercultural experiences, to announce the Kingdom with all the richness of divine diversity.
- ✓ Use and promote inclusive language in all congregational texts.

At the community level:

- ✓ Participation in associations that enhance local culture and community sense.
- ✓ Training in communities for intercultural experience: keys to different modes of communication (high or low cultural context), different ways of processing information, habits and beliefs, etc.
- ✓ Educate for interculturality and inclusion.
- ✓ Inclusive and constructive (non-violent) language practice.

At personal level:

- ✓ Active attitude of inclusion, encouraging meeting and enriching exchange (intentionality is necessary).
- ✓ Inclusive and constructive language practice, also with ourselves.

Spiritual dimension.

Foundation.

LS N°116: “our “dominion” over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.”

LS N°221: “Various convictions of our faith... include the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us, and the security that Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light.”

LS N°92: “Moreover, when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people.”

Missionary Disciples Custodians of Common Home N°139: "Integral Ecology implies a prayerful and contemplative spirituality in action."

Missionary Disciples Custodians of Common Home N°141: “Caring for Mother Earth with the same consideration in the treatment of the poorest, constitutes an ethical horizon of Integral Ecology. Ecological Education is fulfilled in Ecological Spirituality, by moving from environmental information to taking a leap of communion with the Mystery (LS 210). ”

Final Document of the Amazonian Synod N°91: “Synodality marks a style of living communion and participation in local churches that is characterized by respect for the dignity and equality of all the baptized, men and women, the complement of the charisms and the ministries, the pleasure of meeting in assemblies to discern together the voice of the Spirit. ”

According to the principle of integral ecology, to sustain it is necessary to decrease, the enriched groups must decrease so that the impoverished can live and the planet can be sustained. If we apply this to the Church, it means that those who occupy more times, spaces and leaderships must consciously give way to others so that the community is balanced.

Final Document of the Amazonian Synod N° 95: “For the Amazon Church it is urgent that equities for men and women be promoted and conferred equitably.”

Final Document of the Amazonian Synod N° 101: “The wisdom of ancestral peoples affirms that mother earth has a female face (...) It is requested that the voice of women be heard, that they be consulted and participate in decision-making and in this way, they can contribute with their sensitivity to ecclesial synodality (...) It is necessary that she (the woman) assume more strongly her leadership within the Church, and that she (the church) recognizes and promotes it by strengthening her participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, or even in instances of government. ”

Final Document of the Amazonian Synod N° 102: “We recognize the ministry that Jesus reserved for women.”

Actions.

At the general level:

- ✓ Make visible and celebrate the “motherhood of God” (the symbolic is realized daily).
- ✓ Promote the role of women in ecclesiastical spaces, both in decision-making and celebration, as an evangelical duty to present the maternal face of God.
- ✓ Exemplify it from the instances of government of the congregation.

At the community level:

- ✓ Promote, participating, the role of women in celebratory and decision-making ecclesial spaces, as an evangelical duty to present the maternal face of God.
- ✓ Equal social praxis (testify to equality).
- ✓ Cultivate the contemplative gaze, without which no change will be lasting.

At personal level:

- ✓ In the light of the Gospel, women must cultivate courage for social and ecclesial participation with prominence, and men need to surrender times, spaces and leadership (a conscious exercise of opening ways to the periphery; in the Church women are often on the periphery).
- ✓ Cultivate the contemplative gaze, without which no change will be lasting.

Dimension of everyday life.

Foundation.

LS N°19: “Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”

LS N°206: “A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power.”

LS N°209: “An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits.”

LS N°217: ““The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

LS N°222: “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle

the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little.”

Missionary Disciples Custodians of the Common Home N° 6: "Authentic evangelization is evidenced in an ecological conversion."

Missionary Disciples Custodians of Common Home N° 137: “No one in the Church can be indifferent to the cry of the poor and the cry of our sister mother earth. The entire evangelizing process must be thought of as a key to living and living with lovingly in this common home. All catechetical, liturgical, pastoral activity can highlight this vital connection between our faith and the care of Creation⁶.”

We are invited to reflect on how our lifestyles affect the environment and commit ourselves to live in a sustainable way. The good news is that the choice to live this new style, even with small actions, makes a big difference.

Actions:

At the general level:

- ✓ Promote awareness and ecological commitment at all levels.

At the community level:

- ✓ Critical analysis and commitment in all possible daily actions in favour of the planet, from energy saving, reuse, consumption reduction, public transport, etc., living it from an ecological spirituality.

At personal level:

- ✓ LS N°230: “Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which “sows” peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.”

LS N°244: “Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. “

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⁶ A first version of the Eco-Parish Guide can be downloaded from <http://catholicclimatemovement.global/eco-parroquia/>