



**For All the Earth (1 Cor 10:26)
Integrating Charism,
Mission, and Care of Creation**

Session 2: Mission on Behalf of God's Creation

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A Prayer for our Earth

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and
in the smallest of your creatures

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

That we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

Help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,

So precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

That we may protect the world and not prey on it,

That we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.



A Prayer for our Earth

Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

Pope Francis



Sacred Creation by Rufino Zaragoza, OFM

Our Goal

- In this transformative time in religious life, these presentations provide a theological foundation to assist you in consciously integrating the Laudato Si' Action Platform into your ongoing work as congregational leaders.
- The key to our response is viewing our congregational charisms through an evolutionary vision of the Reign of God.





Our Goal

- Today the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor demand that we revision and integrate our mission and ministries in light of the call of *Laudato Si'*.
- To that end, we will answer four questions that arise when we vowed religious consider the climate crises and *Laudato Si'*:
 - Why does this matter now?
 - Why us?
 - What are we to do about it?
 - And How are we to do it?

Another extinction event?

- Scientists say that we live in the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch in which global human activities are affecting the earth and its atmosphere. And not for the good.
- The Anthropocene is named after humans because it is a period of history in which we humans are having massive, Earth-changing impacts affecting our atmosphere, polluting our air, land, and water, even changing DNA through genetic modification.



Why us?

None of these effects on Earth and its creatures is solely our responsibility as vowed religious. But because of our commitment to the Gospel, our abiding faith that what is now is not what God intended, and our compassion for those who suffer and are forgotten, the urge to respond is deeply part of our DNA.

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“Indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31)

- The Hebrew term, *hesed*, describes the breadth and depth of God’s commitment to relationship and stalwart dependability.
- The Greek word, *pistis*, is St. Paul’s way of describing God’s faithfulness.
- This divine *hesed* and *pistis* when viewed through the lens of eschatology becomes the coming reign of God.

Jesus and the Creation

A large field of sunflowers in full bloom, with bright yellow petals and dark brown centers, set against a background of green foliage and a clear sky. The sunflowers are densely packed and stretch across the entire frame.

- When we turn to Jesus’s preaching in the Gospels, we noticed that Jesus “gave ear” to the wider created world. He paid attention and saw a direct connection between the work of nature and the providence of God.
- As his parables attest, the reign of God that Jesus preached is both rooted in creation and yet still evolving.

Poll

- Would you say your charism is clearly embodied in your mission?
- Is your charism evident in your current ministries?



Religious Life after Vatican II

- Faith against culture was out, and the need for a positive relationship between faith and the culture in which a religious congregation lived and worked was emphasized. ..
- These developments could be interpreted as a certain accommodation with the dominant cultures of English-speaking countries in the Western world, or as most women religious did, a commitment to discerning, and responding to, the “signs of the times” (*Gaudium et Spes*).
 - Susan Smith, “Whither Religious Life? Reflections from New Zealand,” *Global Sisters Report* (August 5, 2020).



What are we to do about it?

- Putting our charism at the service of the church and the People of God is what we do.
- In the language of Vatican II, we women religious have taken to heart the call to respond to “the signs of the times.”

New Signs of the Times?

- When we set out on a journey, when we are on our path, we always encounter new things, things we did not know. And this should make us think: am I attached to my things, my ideas, [are they] closed?
- Or am I open to God's surprises? Am I at a standstill or am I on a journey? . . . Am I able to understand the signs of the times and be faithful to the voice of the Lord that is manifested in them?
 - Pope Francis, "Homily," October 13, 2014,



The Context for Complex Underlying Structures

1. It is helpful to understand that problems usually have layers upon layers of complexity that must be considered in order to gain some perspective.
 2. At every stage it is important to spend some time exploring, researching, and reflecting on what is actually happening.
 3. We need others working with us.
 4. Creating alternatives to a problem requires that we allow new insights to emerge and that we free ourselves to see different patterns.
 5. At some point we must act, even as other layers of response probably will emerge as we act.
- Maria Cimperman, *Social Analysis for the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 9.

Mission & *Laudato Si'*

- Mission
 - (1) is complex and layered,
 - (2) requires deep reflection,
 - (3) necessitates interrelationship and collaboration,
 - (4) asks for a freedom and openness to new insights,
 - (5) is an ongoing, evolving activity.
- In a word, we cannot do as we have always done.



“Whole Earth thinking” and the Reign of God



- “ [Whole Earth thinking] calls for dangerous dreams of emancipation, dreams of freedom from the destructive refrains of domination and oppression. It calls for a vision of a more peaceful, just, and sustainable Earth community, a vision of participatory ecological democracy.
 - Sam Mickey, *Whole Earth Thinking and Planetary Coexistence* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 147.



Sharing in the Suffering

- We are “those people” and the interconnectivity of all creation means we share in the suffering.
- St. Paul’s words have never been truer: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Rom 8:22).

Seamless Garment of God

- It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet. . . . (*Laudato Si'* 9)
- In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God's transcendence, within which it develops.
- Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setback... (*Laudato Si'*, 79).





Seamless Garment of God

- This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction.
- The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time “she must above all protect [hu]mankind from self-destruction.”
 - *Laudato Si'*, 9, 79



Disappointing God

- We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems.
- Still, we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world's problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation.
 - *Laudato Si'*, 61.



Disappointing God

- There are regions now at high risk and, aside from all doomsday predictions, the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view, for we have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity.
- “If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations” [Citing Pope John Paul II, “General Audience,” January 17, 2001.]
 - *Laudato Si’*, 61.

The Cry of Earth

- These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years.
- Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty, and fullness.
 - *Laudato Si'*, 53.



A Great History still to Accomplish



- “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.”
 - Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 110

How are we to do it?

- [*Laudato Si'*] constitutes an invitation for vowed religious to respectfully and courageously enter into a dialogue with other persons of good will.
- The fruits of scientific research and contributions from varied faith traditions can move our pluralistic society toward a consensus on the urgent need for action.
- The common good will be enhanced as religious give voice to the poor and marginalized.
- Finally, by their actions, they will offer a prophetic witness on the value of interpersonal communion and an ecologically sensitive relationship with all creation.
 - Timothy Scott, CSB, "*Laudato Si'* and Vowed Religious," *Canadian Religious Conference Bulletin* (Fall 2015): 4.



How are we to do it?

With *Laudato Si'*,
the Mission of God,
the Mission of the Church,
and the Mission of Religious
are now consciously tied
to the Care of our Common Home.





Mission anew

- Mission clarification requires knowing the God of all creation.
- Mission motivation originates in humans knowing their true identity as ones loved by God *within and through* creation.
- Mission correction consists in heeding revelation from the “Book of Creation.”
- The point is that Gospel salvation includes human well-being and the well-being of all of creation.”
 - Dawn M. Nothwehr, “For the Salvation of the Cosmos: The Church’s Mission of Ecojustice,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 43 (2019): 68, 70.



Mission of Accompaniment

- Our growing awareness of our place within the larger created world has broadened our concerns beyond human society.
- We are compelled to do “Whole Earth thinking” and to see how the devastation of Earth has direct effect on those who are marginalized and impoverished.

Earth's Advocate



- Religious often live and serve on the periphery; in places where the environment is often degraded; in urban slums and places lacking safe drinking water or public spaces.
- The international character of many of our communities means that we have an awareness of the particular challenges of life in the developing world, where economic exploitation is often rampant.
- In the first instance, we need to bring that awareness of life at the margins to the forefront within our own communities and then to the broader society.
 - Timothy Scott, CSB. "Laudato Si' and Vowed Religious," *Canadian Religious Conference Bulletin* (Fall 2015): 1.

Charism and Ministry for our Common Home

- We need “to strengthen . . . the charism of the Congregation, without mistaking it for the apostolic work which is carried out. The first remains, the second will pass. The charism . . . is creative, always looking for new paths.”
 - Pope Francis, Meeting with the USG, November 29, 2013.



Live our Legacy with Passion

- That underlying charism continues even when particular ministries can no longer be carried on as strongly as they were or when they are no longer necessary, or no longer possible. When that happens we need to look again to our beginnings to understand what our charism may be asking of us today.
 - Donal Murray, “Glorious and Unfinished—the Year of Consecrated Life,” *The Furrow* 66 (2015): 316.



Live our Legacy with Passion

- It means believing that the same Christ, the same Spirit, the same vocation, that inspired our predecessors is calling us now to be awake and watchful. The gifts and charisms that marked the beginnings of your institutes of consecrated life are alive today by the same power of the same Spirit who awakened them in the first place.
 - Donal Murray, “Glorious and Unfinished—the Year of Consecrated Life,” 314.





Becoming Leaven

- Even imbued with our charisms, how could we vowed religious hope to contribute to the realization of the reign of God when the challenges are so daunting, the costs too high, and our numbers so small?
- “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened” (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20-21).
- We are no longer the foot soldiers of the church, an army of sisters and brothers marshalling students in parochial classrooms. Nor do we need to be.
- As Jesus argued, we are to be leaven. And as the leaven is mixed with flour, we are to join our efforts with others.

Collaboration and Communion

- I also hope for a growth in communion between the members of different Institutes. Might this Year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and to work together, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? This would make for a more effective prophetic witness.
 - Pope Francis, “Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life,” II.3.



Collaboration and Communion

- Communion and the encounter between different charisms and vocations can open up a path of hope. No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the disease of self-absorption.
 - Pope Francis, “Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life,” II.3.



A photograph of four women standing outdoors, smiling and embracing each other. The woman on the far left is wearing glasses and a red vest over a light-colored shirt. The woman next to her is wearing a white headscarf and sunglasses. The woman in the center is wearing a white headscarf and a light-colored jacket. The woman on the far right is wearing glasses and a light-colored jacket. The background shows some foliage and a fence.

Collaboration Efforts

- UISG: “From the outset, the purpose of UISG was to create an international forum, a way for women religious to be in dialogue with each other, with the Church authorities and with global organizations.”
- In 1982, the Justice, Peace, and Creation Commission was jointly established by the USG-UISG.
- In the 1990s, a grassroots organization of sisters under the age of fifty formed Giving Voice.

Collaboration against Trafficking

- In 2009, an international network of religious congregations in 70 countries formed Talitha Kum, to facilitate collaboration and activities against trafficking in persons.
- In 2013, US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking was started as a collaborative, faith-based national network that offers education, supports access to survivor services, and engages in advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.





Collaboration on behalf of Migrants

- The Migrant Project in Sicily was launched on the Jubilee of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG; 1965-2015).
- It established three intercongregational, international and intercultural community houses.
- Here sisters became a bridge between the migrants who come ashore in Sicily and the people of the area, in order to build a true integration.

Collaboration for Earth

- In 2018 UISG initiated “Sowing Hope for the Planet,” a project in which every sister whose congregation is a member of UISG, and their connections are provided with an opportunity to make a difference in our care of the planet.





Collaboration for Earth

- In 2020, sixteen US congregations of Dominican sisters joined with the firm of Morgan Stanley to establish a new investment funds initiative aimed at financing solutions to address climate change and assist communities worldwide most at risk



LAUDATO SI'

Action Platform

A 7- YEAR JOURNEY OF SUSTAINABILITY
FOR EARTH AND ALL OF HER INHABITANTS

- This is a unique collaboration between the Vatican, an international coalition of Catholic organizations, and *“all men and women of goodwill.”* (LS 3)
- Taking a truly ground-up approach, it is rooted in the strengths and realities of communities around the world, empowering all to take *“decisive action, here and now”* as we journey towards a better future together. (LS 161).

Discussion

- How might viewing your charism through the lens of *Laudato Si'* inspire and inform your mission and ministries during this time of transformation into the future?
- In what concrete ways might you collaborate in new ways with other congregations or civic groups to advance the goals of the Laudato Si' Action Plan?





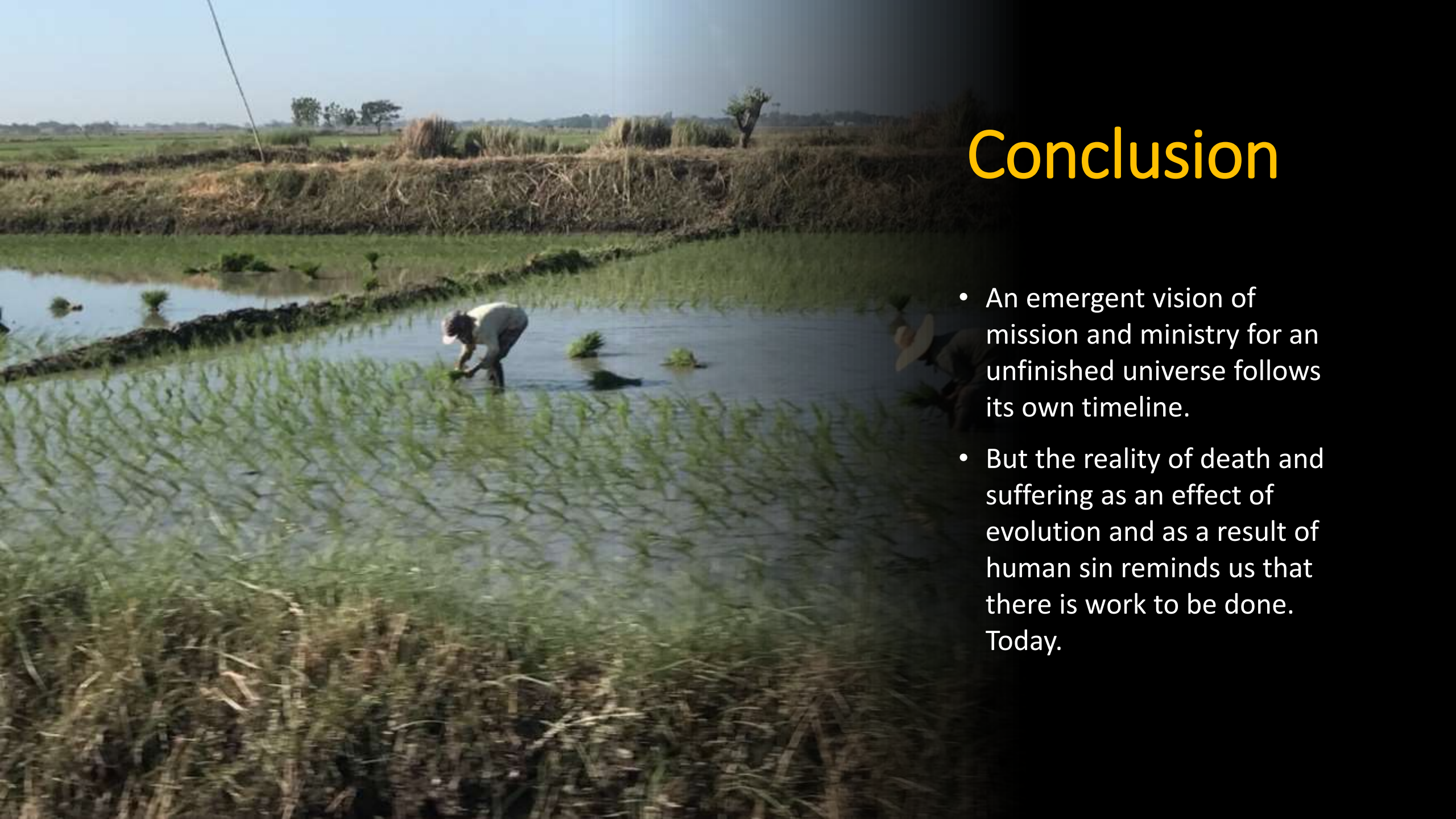
Conclusion

- “The new vision says that religious are not called to be a labor force but a leaven, a caring, calling presence that moves quickly into new needs.”
 - Joan D. Chittister, “No Time for Tying Cats,” 19.
- The congregation’s mission is larger than its ministerial expression of that mission.

Conclusion

- Our mission—as proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth and continued by the church—is to work toward the realization of the reign of God.
- Precisely because we live in an unfinished universe, the reign of God remains the horizon event for which we yearn.
- An emergent vision of mission and ministry for an unfinished universe follows its own timeline.
- But the reality of death and suffering as an effect of evolution and as a result of human sin reminds us that there is work to be done. Today.





Conclusion

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Conclusion

- *Laudato Si'* becomes a charter that redirects and integrates our efforts, so that mission moves from a solely anthropocentric concern for evangelization and conversion to an inclusive cosmic accompaniment, care, and advocacy for all of creation.





Conclusion

- The “how” of our ministry is directly related to the particular charism gifted to our congregation or society by the Holy Spirit, a charism most readily seen in our founders and foundresses, but no less evident in our members today.



Conclusion

- We should ask “How can our charism be put to the service of all of creation?”
- And with that answer we should measure our ministerial activities.
- No longer can individual congregations afford to act alone.
- Perhaps the demographics and institutional diminishment are simply reminders that ministry in an emerging universe must be collaborative.

Conclusion

- The integrity of all of creation surely reminds us that we are most effective when we are most connected.
- We must prayerfully and critically consider where the mission of God, our congregational charisms, and the needs of our common home intersect.
- Indeed, this is ours to do.

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