



“To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves.” (FT, 17)

“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.” (LS, 139)

Becoming People of Action: An Earth Day Reflection

Fifty-one years ago, a grassroots coalition of students, educators, faith leaders, politicians, and other concerned citizens came together to celebrate Earth and to raise awareness of the collective suffering created by environmental exploitation and degradation. The first Earth Day brought about major cultural and policy changes and gave birth to a global movement. This Earth Day, we pray that our love and concern for all creation and for present and future generations will ignite our spirits, transforming us into people of action.

It is this “ecological conversion” to which *Laudato Si’*—Pope Francis’s encyclical on inequality and sustainability (“integral ecology”)—calls us. As we celebrate Earth Day in this special *Laudato Si’* anniversary year (24 May 2020 to 24 May 2021), the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development reminds us that:

We have, in fact, a unique opportunity to transform the present groaning and travail into the birth pangs of a new way of living together, bonded together in love, compassion and solidarity, and a more harmonious relationship with the natural world, our common home. Truly, COVID-19 has made clear how deeply we are all interconnected and interdependent. As we begin to envision a post-COVID world, we need above all an integral approach. ...

The urgency of the situation calls for immediate, holistic and unified responses at all levels - local, regional, national and international. We need, above all, “a peoples’ movement” from below, an alliance of all people of good will. As Pope Francis reminds us, “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of

creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” (LS, 14) [See “Resources” #2.]

Sisters of the Holy Cross’ SOAR Program rises above the challenges of plastic waste

Growing up as a child, there was not much plastic. Then all of a sudden, plastics started emerging in our society. We began using so much plastic but recycling little or none.

Walking around in the streets—going to school, church, and marketplaces—one could see plastics all over, befouling the environment and harming Earth. Increased reliance on plastics in the absence of recycling solutions resulted in clogged drainage systems causing annual flooding that led to losses of life and property.

While I saw plastics as a serious problem, I had a sense that something could be done—that there must be a chain of solutions beginning with picking it up from the streets. But what to do with it was another question. It was out of this need that I initiated the recycling project now known as SOAR (Sisters Organizing and Advancing Recycling).

I realized that others shared in my dream as well, and this soon became a collaborative effort. We understood that real and lasting solutions must be holistic, taking the interdependence of all beings and Earth into consideration. It became our mission to create a program in which both people and Earth would be enriched.

Recognizing that local people were living in poverty, we devised a system by which locals could earn an income by collecting plastics from the street. SOAR purchases collected materials from individuals and provides payment based on the rate recycling partners are paying SOAR for the material. Today, SOAR also educates the public on the importance of recycling and related environmental factors, partners with local parishes and schools, and serves as connecting points for collecting plastics. As our program continues to expand, we never lose sight of the fact that it started with a small spark of an idea—with more questions than answers—but ignited into a movement.

—Sister Comfort Arthur, CSC

This day, as people of faith, we celebrate our care for creation and each other, recognizing that we must work together at every level of society—in our homes, families, schools,

workplaces, and dioceses—to create resilient and sustainable communities where all beings can flourish.

Often, it is not a lack of conviction that causes us to fail to act but rather a sense of powerlessness. How can we make a difference? How can hope to impact the problems we see in our everyday lives? As the experience of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Ghana demonstrates, we begin with the spark of an idea—recognizing the needs around us. By engaging in encounter, we create vital partnerships that turn dreams into tangible outcomes.

Reflection Questions

1. As you look at the places in which you live and minister, what needs to be done to respond to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”?
2. What is one thing you could do to respond to these needs?
3. With whom could you partner to achieve your goal?

Closing Prayer

Transforming God, gift us with the courage and conviction to respond to the “cry of the earth and cry of the poor” (*LS*, 49). Make us bold in walking unfamiliar paths, trusting that you will be walking along with us, giving us the strength to build more just and sustainable societies wherever we are.

Amen.

Resources

1. Brother Alberto Parise, mccj (presenter). (5 February 2021). “Promoting *Laudato Si’* in your Congregation: The need for awareness raising.” UISG, Sowing Hope for the Planet.
2. Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. (2020). “[Laudato Si’ Special Anniversary Year, 24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021.](#)”
3. The History of Earth Day. [Earth Day](#).
4. Pope Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si’: On care for our common home*.
5. Pope Francis. (2020). *Fratelli Tutti: On fraternity and social friendship*.

