**Choosing Life, La Retraite & Laudato Sí**

Like many other members of religious congregations we are joining the Laudato Si Action Platform in response to the Pope’s call, and our concern for our planet.

As an Area of English-speakers in a small congregation, where most members are of retirement age and where there could be a tendency to turn inwards, belonging to the Laudato Sí Action Platform is an invitation to look beyond ourselves and the work of our completion. The Platform invites us to listen to the cry of the earth and cry of the poor. It invites us to see what this means throughout our world, the places we know and especially those unfamiliar to us. It invites us, together with others, to make choices in the way we live that are life-giving for all: it is a way for us to choose life.

We have been encouraged by the insistence of the Laudato Sí Movement to act according to our charism and, rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’, to continue actions already begun. The difference for us is a shift of focus. We are becoming more intentional about what we do, choosing to look at our choices as a community, rather than as a group of individuals.

We have been gradually laying the foundations of our Action Plan since April 2020 in the following way.

1. To gain knowledge and confidence about the issues raised by Laudato Sí and to be better able to facilitate the group, a few of us became Laudato Sí Animators.
2. We then began by inviting all English-speaking sisters to join us and this developed quite naturally into two types of meetings, both using the Zoom platform; the first, meeting bi-monthly, is what we call an ‘ordinary meeting’ where a stable group meets to discuss particular topics, and the second, where we invite everyone in our Area to ‘prayer & a cuppa’. This second type of meeting provides an opportunity for all of us in the Area to gather together to celebrate the Season of Creation for example, or other key moments of the liturgical or ecological year.
3. Consultation with members of the ‘ordinary meeting’ made it clear that we wished to join the LSAP and work on our 7-year plan, but in order to do this some preparation was necessary. We had all read Laudato Sí, but we needed to discuss and reach a common understanding on what we called the main ‘umbrella terms’, such as ‘integral ecology’.
4. The launch of Fratelli Tutti enabled us to move on from there into a better understanding of aspects of the three key areas mentioned by Pope Francis: energy, food and agriculture, and water. Our aim in looking at these questions was to forge a ‘common language’ in the way that we could talk about them, an awareness of their complexity and of how we might begin to respond, both individually and collectively. We hope the way that we are working might generate a response, even if culture demands a different approach, in other parts of our Congregation, and that we can gradually share both our resources and knowledge of working together.
5. From this foundation we then prepared our Public Statement, something we wanted to keep brief and simple, but at the same time, clearly naming the Laudato Sí Goals. With its acceptance we realise we have moved into another stage on our 7-year journey. We hope to experience our charism at work as we move forward and to feel something of the ‘ecological conversion’ demanded of us. This is another ‘umbrella term’ we need to understand if the plan is to be more than an intellectual exercise and become a real and profound experience of ‘Choosing Life’.

We realise we are only at the beginning stages and will face many challenges ahead. How can we plan in such a way that will touch our individual, community and congregational life? What sorts of questions do we need to ask, and to whom?

However, whatever the way we proceed, we have also seen, how this ‘Choosing Life’ is already bearing fruit, with various members involved in local or diocesan Laudato Sí circles or committees, learning from others and offering the fruits of our own experience so far.

We would be delighted to share our resources with others also beginning this journey and to learn from those ahead of us in elaborating their plan, all of us united in choosing Life for the life of our Planet: Laudato Sí, Praise Be!

Sisters of La Retraite Moira McDowall, Mary Bellekom and Ann O’Sullivan,

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