



REFLECTIONS LAUDATO SI' / OUR INTEGRAL ECOLOGY JOURNEY SISTERS OF THE HOLY NAMES OF JESUS AND MARY

INTRODUCTION WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE HAVE REFLECTED

We are the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, founded in Longueuil, Quebec (near Montreal) in 1843. Blessed Marie-Rose Durocher, our foundress, established our congregation to be educators in the faith, particularly for women and children, and with special concern for students living in rural areas, and those of limited means.

As the Congregation grew, missions were established in other Canadian provinces, along the east and west coasts of the United States, in Lesotho, in Southern Africa and other locations around the world. On June 30, 2022, there were 572 Sisters of the Holy Names, and Affiliates numbered 521. Our principal languages are English and French, and, for some, their first language is Sesotho, Spanish or Portuguese.

While we were originally primarily involved in formal education in Catholic schools, gradually we branched out to other settings in parishes and in secular settings, and we became involved in continuing education of adults, and advocacy for justice as a form of education.

The 1981-82 articulation of our Constitutions resonates with Laudato Si' values and invitations. They begin to mirror the Laudato Si' recognition of the interconnectedness of everything when they describe the Church's mission of education as one which "aims at the full development of the human person" (Constitutions #11) and demands of us "active involvement in the promotion of justice" (Constitutions # 13). The following passage of our Constitutions connects our evangelical call with the necessity to work with others as we consider a world in which all can live sustainably and with dignity: "We are challenged by the Gospel and by the needs of society to unite our efforts with those around us to attain for all people conditions of life more equitable and more worthy of human dignity" (Constitutions #14). The recognition that resources are limited and an urging to use all goods with responsibility and gratitude are woven into our Constitution's section on the vow of poverty (Constitutions #30).

Every five years, members of our Congregation come together to reflect on the signs of the times and on the call to refocus our attention and energy. At these General Chapters and through the prescience of some of our members, we gradually became more focused on listening to the cry of the poor and more conscious of the cry of the Earth, our common home. We awakened to the need to make integral ecology and care of the earth, a core part of our efforts in education and advocacy.

In the next part of this document, we share some of the reflections resulting from our congregational gatherings, particularly at more recent General Chapters, and trace how our corporate consciousness has evolved related to integral ecology.



LOOKING AT OUR COMMITMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF THE LSAP GOALS

The Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP) proposes seven goals through which to consider reflection and action. After reviewing our corporate statements, we identified statements that pertained to the individual LSAP goals: Response to the cry of the Earth, response to the cry of the poor, ecological economics, adopting simple lifestyles, ecological education, ecological spirituality and community involvement and participation.

In this way, we hope to identify where there might be strengths and gaps in what we have considered to date. This section contains an analysis of what goal(s) our attention was focused on at various times in our history.

1) LSAP GOAL: RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE POOR

Our Congregation was established because our foundress Blessed Marie-Rose Durocher heard the cries of the poor and wanted to respond. Her letters and those of the Congregational leaders who followed her, frequently counsel the Sisters to live and work in Church and society, conscious of the voices of those on the margins, of those without access to education, and who struggle just to survive. It was not until after Vatican II that our General Chapter documents began to articulate this theme.

Since our SNJM General Chapters of 1986 and 1991, we have intentionally referred to the cry of our impoverished sisters and brothers in our Chapter Acts. We chose solidarity with economically poor and disadvantaged people as the focus of our mission and made the promotion of justice a priority in all our apostolic endeavors.

As witnesses and prophets of the Good News, we chose to develop and support alternative projects that empower persons who are poor or disadvantaged; to provide justice education wherever we minister; to confront our complicity in injustice and to work toward systemic change of structures that oppress. (1986ff)

After study mandated by the 1996 General Chapter, our congregational leaders decided that the Congregation would collaborate with the United Nations by participating in non-governmental organizations (NGO).

In 2011 and 2016, we heard the cries of our sisters and brothers experiencing violent conflicts, displacement and forced migration as well as the struggles of Indigenous peoples in our own countries. Conscious of "tensions over immigration and the influx of refugees and the global crises of finance, food and climate change that have exacerbated the gap between rich and poor...we hear a new call to partner with immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples to resist racism, advocate for human rights", work for reconciliation and "create welcoming communities." (2011)

In response to the call of General Chapters, we developed a congregational process so we could use our influence by taking corporate stands for systemic change.

2) LSAP GOAL: RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH

In 1996, we reflected on the connection between the cry of Earth and the voices of women, especially those who live in poverty or are in situations of violence. In both cases, we identified domination and violence as root causes. Therefore, we called ourselves “to look at Earth through the eyes of women... to sensitize and educate to the reality of eco-feminism... to take a stand against violence toward women, children and the earth, and to be in solidarity with groups that work for human rights and the life of the planet.”

At the next General Chapter, we recognized “our interdependence with all of creation and committed to safeguard the beauty and abundance of Earth, celebrate daily and seasonal cycles, and reserve sacred space for the Sabbath.” We called ourselves “to denounce in a nonviolent way all that is contrary to basic human rights, to the dignity of the human person and to the harmony of creation.” (2001)

At the 2016 General Chapter, we were ready to embrace the vision of Laudato Si’ and to commit to integral ecology. We recognized that “the social, political, economic and environmental problems of our century are global in nature and are integrally intertwined.” (2016) As we read in Laudato Si’ (#139), there is only one complex crisis which is both social and environmental in nature. Once again, we pledged to “examine our own complicity in global problems; to live in even greater solidarity with marginalized peoples, and to confront the forces that perpetuate their marginalization...; to work toward a more equitable distribution of resources and the greater sustainability of Earth, our common home.” (2016)

3) LSAP GOAL: ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY

Called by General Chapter 1986, we have made decisions to direct our investments in a manner that promotes social and environmental responsibility.

We also made a commitment to study and analyze harmful economic systems that dehumanize people or contribute to the destruction of Earth, and to seek and support alternative economic models that support greater sustainability of the whole community of life. (2011 and 2016)

4) LSAP GOAL: ADOPTING SIMPLE LIFESTYLES

We committed ourselves to examine our lifestyles and change our attitudes and behaviors as consumers in order to reduce our negative impact on Earth (1996, 2016); to support a healthy future for the next generations by engaging in corporate and individual actions to slow global warming through education and personal changes to our lifestyles. (2006)

5) LSAP GOAL: ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

“We believe that liberating action, which aims at the full development of the human person, is at the heart of our mission of education in all our ministries.” (1991)

In our Chapter Acts, we recognized that our special concern for the poor and disadvantaged called us to educate for justice and systemic change (1986); to sensitize to eco-feminism (1991); and to incorporate ecological awareness and responsibility in all our educational ministries. (1996, 2016)

As a community of educators, we have renewed our commitment to study which moves us to act from a deeper understanding of issues, to learn paths to God from other religious and cultural traditions. (2001)

“We seek out educational opportunities that will increase our sensitivity to, and our understanding of, causes that lead to displacement of people from their homes, to economic disparity among peoples, to human trafficking, to the violence perpetuated by governments, and to the destruction of Earth.” (2016)

These experiences will enable us to be more conscious of our interactions with persons of different cultures, races and religious beliefs.

6) LSAP GOAL: ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

Communal reflection on “contemplation in action” preceded our 1996 General Chapter. This communal process led us to articulate our spirituality in this way: “Contemplation in action is the creative energy at the heart of our mission... To contemplate is to be in the presence of God who is passionate about all creation; (it is) to be in the presence of the Holy One who is revealed in the faces of all those we encounter, particularly persons who are poor and marginalized.”

We stand in solidarity with people who are poor or marginalized. As we read in our Constitutions, “We are challenged by the Gospel and by the needs of society to unite our efforts with those around us to attain for all people conditions of life more equitable and more worthy of human dignity.” These statements we believe are integral to our SNJM spirituality.

In 2011, we heard the call to develop “a spirituality of presence to the other...which requires a willingness to be ‘stranger,’ that is to choose opportunities and experiences that stretch us beyond the familiar and the comfortable.” As Sisters and Affiliates, we are united in our mission “to proclaim by our lives the primacy of the love of a welcoming God.” (2016) In that spirit, we welcome migrants and refugees and we seek reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. (2011, 2016)

Every General Chapter since 1996 called us to act for greater sustainability of Earth, our common home. As we articulated our call five years later, we wrote that “We participate in renewing Earth by recognizing our interdependence with all creation and establishing right and harmonious relationships; safeguarding the beauty and abundance of Earth; celebrating daily and seasonal cycles, and reserving a sacred space for the Sabbath.” (2001)”

It is our belief that the vision of Laudato Si’ will require full participation by women. Therefore, we regard our 1986 General Chapter Acts promoting the development of women’s spirituality as a significant piece of the LSAP goal related to spirituality. We believe that the virtues we seek to develop as women are the ecological virtues that will enable us to care for creation and for people who are most vulnerable.

“We believe that the Paschal Mystery is at the heart of our lives”; and that “the authentic celebration of Eucharist transforms and empowers us to give birth to a new creation.” (2001) This statement challenges us to discover the cosmic dimension of the mystery of the Eucharist as we find in Laudato Si’ #236.

***“We desire God; we desire what God desires;
we desire God’s justice, tenderness and communion.” (1996)***

7) LSAP GOAL: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION

The opening of the Acts of 2006 General Chapter expressed our oneness with all creation: “Everything in the universe moves and is sustained through interdependence. The human family participates in these creative relationships which unite all in a common future.”

“Interdependence for the common good requires us to collaborate with those who are working to eliminate all forms of oppression, act for a just world and foster fullness of life.” (2011) We therefore pledged ourselves, “to seek and participate in collaborative structures, relationships and actions that liberate life where it is threatened and to stand with groups who act and advocate for the care of Earth, our common home.” (2016)

“In response to the call to act in solidarity with all peoples in regions affected by the lack of potable water, we chose to partner with agencies that provide training and equipment ..., to advocate for corporate change in companies that pollute water, to engage in impact investing with companies” developing solutions... (2016).

As we increasingly realized that we have more impact working with others and had the need to learn from others’ approaches, we pledged “to continue to widen our circles of collaboration, and to imagine the SNJM mission in new ways, open to all for the sake of the world, the Church, and the whole Earth community.” (2016)

2021 ACTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

All our previous reflections have culminated in the following statement, written in 2021. Strengthened by the words of Laudato Si’, the vision of an integral ecology permeated our Chapter Acts, a statement placed here in its entirety. It is out of these 2021 Acts that a Congregational Guiding Committee for Laudato Si’ and Integral Ecology was formed, and the decision was made to register on the Laudato Si’ Action Platform.

AN URGENT CALL, A DARING RESPONSE

We, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, believe that the call of our lives is rising from the voice of God and from the voice of the world today. The call is radical, compelling and urgent; our response must be daring!

We hear the cries of a planet and of persons who cannot breathe. With hearts attuned to Earth, our Common Home, and to the human longing for community, solidarity and justice, we heard the cry of God’s people, near and far suffering isolation, exclusion and racism in its diverse expressions world-wide. Conscious of these realities, in what ways will we seek forgiveness and reconciliation? What risks are we willing to take?

Weighed down by economic inequality, people hunger for a just distribution of the goods of this world. This impels us to examine our security and abundance in light of this reality and of the call of Laudato Si’. So, we ask, how shall we act?

Our SNJM charism, gift of the Spirit and legacy of Marie-Rose Durocher, impels us to act from our strength and our vulnerability. At every stage of our life, rooted in prayer and believing in the power of presence, we commit ourselves to:

- Adopt new worldviews, attitudes, and ways of being through encounters with a diversity of peoples, cultures, faith traditions and collaborators in mission;
- Deepen our consciousness of and capacity to live our oneness and interdependence with the whole Earth community;
- Be a catalyst in creating new forms of community and partnerships that embrace integral ecology as a way of life;
- Call ourselves to personal and communal transformation that impels us to collaborate with others in being a prophetic witness in religious life, in the Church and in our world today.”

As Sisters and Affiliates, in collaboration with our Partners, we will walk together to bring these Chapter Acts to life!

CONCLUSION: WE HAVE BEGUN; WE CONTINUE ...

In preparing to post this reflection on the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, we have come to see that we have already taken several steps to grow in our understanding about integral ecology and have acted to advocate for Earth, our common home, and to respond to the cry of the poor. We have grown in our understanding of the intersectionality of the issues named in Laudato Si’. As a Congregation we have spoken out about these issues and as individuals and in regions, we have become involved with other individuals and groups to advocate for specific issues according to our interests and the needs of our local regions. Individuals and groups have also made life-style choices.

The Sisters of the Holy Names, their Affiliates and Partners may be found in groups seeking justice for persons who are trafficked, opposing racism and climate change, discussing reconciliation and reparations for indigenous peoples, advocating for better working conditions, preservation of forests, or decreasing reliance on fossil fuels. To date we have taken three corporate stands: to counter trafficking in persons, to protect water as a human right, and to welcome migrants and refugees. We are working through NGO’s (non-governmental organizations), specifically UNANIMA in the US, and Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, and we have worked with the Transformation Resource Center in Lesotho. We promote integral ecology in our schools and collaborate with other educators in church and civic arenas.

Our administrative offices have worked at making our facilities “greener”, at exercising shareholder influence with our investments, and we consider the environment when we relinquish property. SNJM committees and networks seek ways to continue our own internal growth and education.

HOWEVER, AS OUR CHAPTER ACTS SAY, “WE ARE CALLED TO MORE.”

We recognize that many of us live in a culture of consumerism. We are aware that, collectively, our carbon footprint is beyond what is sustainable. We know that any external efforts must be accompanied by a fundamental transformation of our relationship with creation.

Moreover, our plans for the 2023-24 year reflect our desire to take a step back, to review and celebrate how we have responded to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor. During this time of review and reflection, we will discern what our next corporate steps should be.

We are currently participating in a 10-session process called “Thresholds of Transformation,” a process grounded in integral ecology through which we hope to become more internally open to the changes required of each of us, and all of us, in response to the challenges of our times and the environment in which we currently live.

This reflection is a product of the Congregational Guiding Committee for Laudato Si’ and Integral Ecology, established in 2022 to support SNJM Sisters, Affiliates and Partners seeking to deepen their understanding of the principles of Laudato Si’ and to take greater care of Earth, our common home.