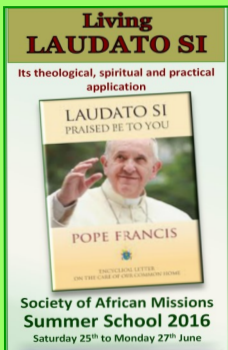


AFRICAN LINK

NEWSLETTER OF SMA LAITY GROUPS

Society of African Missions, Dromantine, Glen Road,
Newry, Co Down, BT34 1RH.



SPECIAL ISSUE LIVING LAUDATO SI'

This edition of African Link focuses on the recent SMA Summer School held in Dromantine, the theme of which was “Living *Laudato Si'* - Its Theological, Spiritual and Practical Application”

The SMA logo above shows a map of Africa and three doves symbolizing Faith, Hope and Charity, last words of SMA founder, Bishop de Marion Bresillac. The SMA was founded on December 8, 1856 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fourviere, Lyons, France.

DAY ONE

The SMA Summer School 2016, held in Dromantine, and attended by around 100 people was opened by Dr Cathriona Russell, a theologian from Trinity College, Dublin. In her presentation, “Realities are greater than Ideas; *Laudato Si'* and Environmental Ethics”, Cathriona (pictured right during the Creation Walk) spoke of the impact of *Laudato Si'* on how people think about climate change and their response to it. She suggested that the Papal Encyclical outlines both the practical implications of and a theological response to the environmental crisis. She highlighted a number of key themes and also models for action as a response to current realities. She also challenged those present to re-define “environment” as something much broader than creation in its natural context and to recognise that all environments are important—the man-made and the functional as well as the natural and more attractive.



Following the opening presentation, participants divided into their workshop group. One group attended Pádraig Mallon’s workshop on “*Laudato Si'* and Business - Good Corporate Citizenship or Profit Making Opportunity?” Pádraig, a sustainability professional from a corporate background, contrasted the more traditional approach to corporate social responsibility, ie simply writing a cheque with the increased focus currently on making a real difference. He suggested that there is a repositioning of values within the corporate mentality, placing more emphasis on facilitating and enhancing human potential and nurturing fulfilment, and that *Laudato Si'*, is key to sustaining this shift, with its focus on the human experience, especially that of the poor.

The other group listened to Mary Kate Hagan RSM reflect on “*Laudato Si'* - A New Planetary Vision”, who offered some thoughts on the cosmic journey of creation and the human place within it. In addition she shared her own experience of becoming more ecologically aware and conscious of caring for creation. In this context she spoke of establishing the Ecology Project “Glor Na Mara” in Bundoran and of the practical and ideological issues which had to be addressed in developing the garden, and encouraged those present to explore ways of connecting more fully with the earth and the life it sustains.

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DAY ONE CONT'D

The two workshops offered in the afternoon were given by Professor Eamonn Conway, Head of Theology and Religious Studies at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and Dr John Feehan, a noted author and expert on biodiversity, cultural heritage and maintaining eco-systems. Professor Conway spoke on “*Laudato Si’* - the Biblical and Technological Paradigms”, highlighting the tension between the model for happiness outlined in Scripture and the cultural desire for control in modern society, powerfully illustrated by the predominance of technology

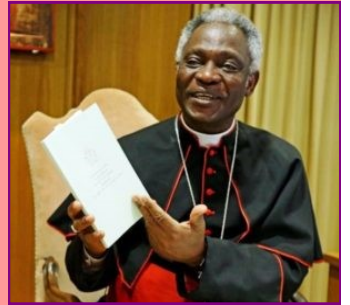


and instant communications. While technology, he suggested encourages people to seek and accumulate, to be self-sufficient and autonomous, the Eucharist is the antidote to the consumerist mindset and draws humanity into the fullness of God’s love as nourishment, as interdependent receivers.



At the same time, Dr Feehan (picture right and above) conducted a “Creation Walk” around the ground of Dromantine, highlighting its role as the natural habitat for various species and emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependency of the plants and animals. This is one of the key messages of *Laudato Si’* to which Pope Francis returns repeatedly,

emphasizing particularly the responsibility which that interdependency places on us for the rest of humanity, and the rest of creation, particularly the poor.



The afternoon session was closed by a video presentation, specially prepared for the Summer School by Cardinal Peter Turkson (pictured left), the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and a key advisor to Pope Francis on *Laudato Si’*. He focused on capturing the content of *Laudato Si’*, encouraging all attending the Summer School to become familiar with its key messages and to go forward from the event committed to their promotion. He emphasized the importance of education and awareness-raising in order to galvanize communities to respond to the current crisis and to effect real change in the lifestyles people lead and the impact they have on our common home. In outlining how *Laudato Si’* can promote Subsidiarity (shared responsibility and joint participation by all in the human family), he urged the audience to become agents of a revolution of tenderness for the poor and for creation, and to address the situations around them with an intelligence of heart, especially for the fragility of creation and of the poor.

DAY TWO

Day Two was presented by Dr Donal Dorr, a Kiltegan missionary priest, facilitator and author on Catholic Social Teaching, with a particular interest in ecology. The first session considered *Laudato Si’* and its capacity for spiritual contemplation, through an exploration of the cosmic story and the interrelated development of all life. Dr Dorr suggested that creation is an ongoing revelation of God’s love and as such humans are one small part of a story which spans tens of millions of years. He highlighted a key message of Pope Francis that all life has value simply by virtue of its creation and its place in the cosmic story and should be respected and cherished for those reasons. The culture of regarding other life as valuable only insofar as it is a resource to be used derives from the “wrong” interpretation of humans as stewards of creation and therefore its masters. He encouraged the Summer School participants to nurture a sense of wonder and awe at the diversity and complexity of creation and their place within it, and in that context to respect creation as a means of encountering that love of God in a most simple, yet profound way.



The second session of the morning considered how this spirituality might be translated into action and explored practical ideas and activities which might facilitate this. Some focus was placed on what individuals can do on a personal level, and of the need to become “painfully aware” of the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”, of what is happening in the world, and to make a conscious effort to respond to this suffering as if it were a personal experience of suffering. He also outlined practical ways to respond to the current crisis through eating locally produced food and eating less meat; using public transport, walking or cycling; and consciously conserving energy. He also stressed the need for community, local and international initiatives on the use and promotion of fossil fuels, Genetically Modified seeds and foods, divestment from fossil fuels by pension funds, and boycotting of corporations who are failing to discharge their ecological debt or not complying with international agreements on these matters. He suggested that the ecological issues cannot be resolved by technology but only by action on the recognised causes of climate change and by education and awareness raising, which is the responsibility of every person.

After lunch there was a chance for discussion and exchange on the morning sessions, enabling those present to reflect on what had touched them personally or connected with their awareness of God’s presence in creation and the natural world.

The day concluded with a celebration of the Eucharist. This unique experience, shaped by Donal’s deeply spiritual reflections, encompassed many of the themes and ideas which had been discussed earlier in the day, with shared responsibility for participation in the celebration, and creation and nature as the centrepiece around the altar (pictured left).



DAY THREE

The final day of the Summer School began with a presentation by Dr Lorna Gold, Head of Policy and Advocacy at Trócaire. Exploring “*Laudato Si’* - A Challenge for Governments and Policy Makers”, Lorna (pictured below) cited the “disruptive power of *Laudato Si’*” and its wide ranging impact across business,



social and cultural structures. She referred to Bill McKibben, author, Co-founder of 350.org and a committed environmental activist, who has described *Laudato Si’* as an event with the power to transform the course of human history and that of the planet. She related comments made at a Vatican conference on *Laudato Si’*, which suggested that Pope Francis had thrown open the political and policy debates and had said the “unsayable”.

Lorna went on to explain that one of the strengths of *Laudato Si’* is its basis in science, on facts, not policy or suggestion and that its alternative perspective of ongoing dialogue between faith and science allows the document to stand out. She suggested that Pope Francis has established a new benchmark with the political agenda of *Laudato Si’* in its express concern for the poorest peoples and their environmental experiences, and has, through his personal intervention in the Paris COP21 negotiations, shifted the debate in favour of a more ambitious approach to climate change. She highlighted internationalisation of climate change as a global priority, and the demand for more robust governance in implementing agreements and regulating global finance, as two key approaches from the document with the potential to impact on



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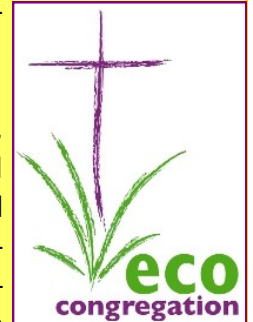
The SMA is seeking Volunteers to help to highlight the effects of climate change and the need for climate justice for world's poorest countries. Training in delivering a faith-based awareness raising programme will be provided to volunteers, along with all necessary resources and support. This training will be offered in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Newry. To register your interest please send your personal details to climate.volunteer@sma.ie

DAY THREE CONT'D

She also highlighted the call from *Laudato Si'* for a new concept of progress, broader and more inclusive than simply economic growth, that would promote a "de-growth" and be more tuned into a reduction of consumption. Citing the statistic that 65 individuals have the equivalent wealth of the poorest half of the world's population,

she accepted that *Laudato Si'* is very much at odds with current global patterns of ever increasing growth. She argued however that its power to move people creates the potential for new conversations and a more honest dialogue to occur. In giving life to social movements calling for divestment from fossil fuels and action on climate justice, *Laudato Si'* has, she said, the capacity to change mind-sets and so begin the conversion needed at local level.

The morning finished with two workshop sessions. One was hosted by Catherine Devitt, Environmental Justice Officer from the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, who offered thoughts, reflections and activities on "*Laudato Si'* - A Universal Template for Social Transformation". Simultaneously a workshop was hosted by Catherine Brennan SSL, Co-Founder of Eco-Congregation Ireland. Catherine spoke on "*Laudato Si'* - Practical Application at Personal, Parish and Community Level" referring, among other things, to the Eco-Parish Award scheme



The final presentation of the Summer School was delivered by Dr Sean McDonagh SSC, a prolific author and speaker on ecology and biodiversity and a consultant in the preparation of *Laudato Si'*. Dr Mc Donagh (pictured left), spoke on "*Laudato Si'* - A Prophetic Challenge for the 21st Century" and identified *Laudato Si'* as the most important document to come from the Church in the last 120 years. Acknowledging Pope Francis as the first Christian leader to speak of the natural world in the correct terms, he nonetheless warned of the danger that even such a landmark document could remain simply a text on many bookshelves. He welcomed the inclusion of references to 21 international Bishop's conferences as evidence of a wider Church vision, but suggested that the implementation of *Laudato Si'* will require a catechesis which changes our moral consciousness to reflect love of God, love of neighbour, love of the earth, and that such catechesis needs to be systematic and extensive at all levels across Church and social structures. As part of this process, he highlighted, as a key message of *Laudato Si'*, the intrinsic value of all species and the need for our spirituality to reflect this appreciation of the earth and all of creation as an extraordinary gift from God.

This year's Summer School was a rich and engaging weekend with great participation, much material for reflection and prayer, and the potential for meaningful action as a result. Our sincere thanks to all those who contributed and to Fr Kevin O'Gorman SMA for his excellent facilitation of the event.

