



# AFRICA & the World

## Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

*“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”*

Ps 24.1

At a time when advances made in the past decades to protect human dignity, promote the common good and care for the environment are being challenged, the values of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) are needed more than ever. As political, social and economic divisions become wider, action to promote justice and peace and provide a counter witness to the current wave of exclusion and greed is needed. This is an urgent mission for believers and for all who seek the common good.



we love the world or the creation which we share. We cannot love creation without loving the God who made it.

### Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

The Bible gives us a clear understanding of what the concepts of justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation mean. We are brought to see, with God’s eyes, how we are to relate with Him, with other human beings and with all creation. *“Right Living”* requires being faithful to the demands of this threefold relationship – with God, with one another and with creation - over which God has given us guardianship.

Further, there is an *interdependence* and an *interaction* between all three relationships. Each is required for the other to truly exist. We cannot love God without loving our neighbour. We cannot love our neighbour unless

### Social Teaching is Evolving

From its historical reading and listening to the Word of God and the teaching of our elders, the believing community has learned, *and is still learning*, what is required to come to this desired and balanced behaviour. The Ten Commandments set out the basic position, while the life, teaching and example of Jesus Christ enhances our understanding of the right relationships which we, as Christians, are commissioned to establish.

The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church has, down through the years, elaborated on all these teachings. Reading the signs of the various times, the Church has been able to draw out new insights – interpreting and providing food for thought for all people of goodwill. Her teaching is to

be found at the crossroads where Christian life and Conscience come into contact with the complex issues of our ever- changing world.



### Pope Francis continues to build upon the teachings of the Bible and of his predecessors:

- By regularly presenting the Biblical image of God as a kind, understanding, forgiving and merciful God.
- By reiterating the Gospel's teaching on "right relationships" among human beings, so as to guide our human behaviour and help us to organize our lives together.

Pope Francis often writes and speaks about:

- *Respect for dignity of the human person* – the foundation principle of all Catholic Social Teaching.
- *Concern for the Common Good* - helping to provide the social conditions which allow human beings to reach their fulfilment.
- *Living in solidarity with other people* – committing oneself to the good of all and the human rights of all.

- *Taking special care of the poor, the refugees and the vulnerable* – making sure that no section of the human population is excluded.

- *Having an open attitude and a readiness to listen and be reconciled* – no individual or group contains all wisdom or possesses all truth.

- *Promoting the integral development of all human beings* – true progress cannot happen if only one aspect of the human person (e.g. economic needs, technical aspects) is being addressed....openness to the spiritual, ethical and transcendent is necessary.

- *Utilizing a "subsidiary approach" in governance* – the way forward in maintaining interest, involvement and recognition of cultural differences in decision-making in both society and within the Church.

- *Caring for the Earth and using its goods in a spirit of stewardship* – nature cannot be reduced to being a mere instrument to be exploited, as we are intimately interconnected with one another and with all the life-systems of the planet.

**It is clear that Justice, Peace and Care for the Environment are active concepts and refer to a relational dimension in human society. They imply engagement in an open-ended and ongoing process. Human beings will always need the guidance of a "vision" – a vision that is inspired by God, the Author of all Creation. Further, there will always be need for committed people to implement that vision.**



### Integrity of Creation

Caring for the environment and its link to climate change have become topical issues in recent times. Worldwide, and especially during 2017 - 2018, we see more examples of extreme weather events such as storms, floods, heat waves and wildfires. It has become clear, that while there have been changes in climate many times in the history of our planet, what is different about this period of the earth's history is that *human activities* are significantly contributing to climate change.

Climate change has been highlighted in a series of international conferences. Since the adoption of the *Kyoto Protocol* (1997), a strong movement for action has emerged. These largely focused on Climate Justice and the need for the legally binding targets that were finally agreed in the Paris Agreement (December 2015). While it is disappointing that the USA have now officially reneged on the Agreement, most

other countries are making efforts – in varying degrees - to implement it.

Another major step forward in raising consciousness was the publication of the Papal Document: "*Laudato Si': On the Care of our Common Home*" (June 2015). In addition to incisive analysis, Pope Francis focuses on the idea of "*integral ecology*" – connecting care of the natural world with justice for the poorest and most vulnerable people. He insists on **Science** as providing the best tool for listening to the cry of the earth, while dialogue and education are the two keys that "*can help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us*".

**While many regard climate change as simply a technical and economic issue, Pope Francis asks: how can it be possible for human beings to live life to the full in a polluted and ailing planet? In other words, there is a moral dimension involved. Actions which we**

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**take to-day can undermine the well-being of millions of people – especially the poor – and condemn future generations to live in an inhospitable world.**

The Response to *Laudato Si'* has been very encouraging among Christians, people of other faiths and none. Groups of volunteers are coming together on countless and imaginative projects to “*save our common home*”, while various organisations continue to lobby governments, multinationals and businesses to meet their commitments. Individuals are doing their own “**little, but very important bit**” in their homes, at work and “*while on the go*” to decrease their personal carbon footprint.

## **The SMA and JPIC**

The 2013 SMA Irish Assembly made work in this area a priority. Since then all events in the SMA Calendar have raised awareness of Justice issues and tried to promote a Christian response to them.

One particular area of concern, born from the experience of SMA’s seeing the impact of climate change in Africa, was the need to promote climate justice and to raise awareness of the negative impact that our lifestyle is having. From

this came the **Thumbprint Campaign for Climate Justice**. This seeks a personal commitment from individuals to reduce their own carbon footprint. Over the past three years this Campaign has (and continues to be) delivered in Schools and Parishes around the country.

More recently, and as a follow-up to this campaign, the SMA has developed two new initiatives that highlight the interconnection and interdependence of humanity and creation and between the developed and the developing world. The first: **The Family Tree Programme**, is a resource for parents/teachers and children to explore human and Christian values that guide us in our own families, in the wider human family and in how we relate to the family of creation.

The second initiative, inspired by Pope Francis’ Encyclical letter, is **The Laudato Tree Programme**. This is a very practical way of connecting people to their local environment and to the African environment. This project provides a way for people to plant trees here in **Ireland** and in the **African Great Green Wall**. This not only cares for the family of creation but also cares for all of us - the human family who depend on it.

### **Laudato Tree Project**

For information about this and about the Great Green Wall see [sma.ie/laudatotree](http://sma.ie/laudatotree)

### **Family Tree Programme**

To access information and resources visit [sma.ie/family-tree-programme](http://sma.ie/family-tree-programme)