

**THE VOICE OF WOMEN
ON THE SYNODAL JOURNEY**

BULLETIN UISG

NUMBER 176, 2021

PRESENTATION	2
WOMEN IN A SYNODAL CHURCH. SYNODALITY AND THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN ECCLESIAL DELIBERATION AND DECISION-MAKING	4
<i>Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ</i>	
THE VOICE OF CONSECRATED WOMEN ON THE ROAD OF SYNODALITY	11
<i>Sr. Liliana Franco Echeverri, ODN</i>	
50 YEARS OF "JUSTICE IN THE WORLD": THE SYNOD THAT "CATALYZED" CONSECRATED LIFE	18
<i>Sr. Anne Béatrice Faye, CIC</i>	
HOLISTIC FORMATION OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS FOR MISSION IN A FAST CHANGING WORLD	28
<i>Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR</i>	
GLOBAL COMPACT ON EDUCATION: FINAL DECLARATIONS AND ACTION PLANS	35
<i>Commission on Education UISG-USG</i>	
LIFE AT UISG	39
STAFF UISG	44



PRESENTATION

The voice of Women on the Synodal Journey

The next Synod of Bishops, entitled: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” will convoke the Church for a journey organized in various stages that will involve the participation of the whole People of God through a lengthy process of consultation.

Synodality, a constitutive dimension of the Church, is therefore the main road along which this journey will unfold, in the search, on the part of the whole Church, for greater relationality, dialogue and inclusion.

What voice will women and consecrated women have on this long journey of preparation and research? Which will their contribution be?

Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ

Women in a synodal Church

Synodality and the inclusion of women in ecclesial deliberation and decision-making.

To apply synodality day by day, it is necessary to integrate and live a particular spirituality that requires attitudes of faith and trust (in God, in others), listening and humility, dialogue, and freedom to seek the truth. Such spirituality nurtures a true culture of encounter at the service of the common good, accepting and respecting differences with the conviction that the Spirit speaks in each person and that we can only discern the calls of the Spirit together in this mutual listening. Synodality means moving from ‘I’ to ‘we’ rediscovering the primacy of the ecclesial ‘we’ of an open and inclusive community that walks together with Christ in the center. By putting Christ and others at the center, synodality builds us as the People of God.

Sr. Liliana Franco Echeverri, ODN

The voice of Consecrated Women on the road of synodality

It is another logic, that of the Spirit, which always takes us beyond what we are capable of calculating or assuming. The one that puts us in the place of the small and makes us value what is free, celebrate friendship and take care of the community. The one that throws us down unknown paths and demands that we dare to engage in the unsuspected events of the Kingdom, receiving them from the hand of God. It is the logic of those who trust.

The synodal style is, at this historical moment, the new way of being and making

the Church. Journeying together is the condition for listening to reality and responding in an evangelical way to the challenges of this historical moment.

Sr. Anne Béatrice Faye, CIC

50 years of Justice in the World: the Synod that “catalyzed” Consecrated Life

What justice is needed for greater human dignity and promotion of integral development in Africa? In speaking about human dignity, we are referring to all expressions of fundamental rights, individual freedoms, relations, and well-being at all levels. More concretely, what is the result of these five decades of *Justice in the World* within the Church and our religious Institutes, particularly in Africa?

Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR

Holistic Formation of Leaders of Religious Congregations for Mission in a fast Changing World

Unquestionably, leadership ministry is challenging. Nevertheless, God is faithful. Whenever a person is called to leadership, God gives the graces needed. In the religious life, the ministry of leadership offers a unique opportunity to serve one’s brothers and sisters - helping to bear their burdens, animating and encouraging them to fully embrace their calling. Exposed to the human struggles, the leader grows in dealing with his or her own personal struggles. Access to the inner workings of other people and how God journeys with them is a great gift that religious leaders are given. Such is a privilege. For this reason, the leader is to handle with respect and dignity the life of those he/she is leading and hold their stories sacred.

Commission on Education of UISG-USG

Global compact on education: Final Declarations and Action Plans

Keep being synodal! As educators, we want to keep learning how to walk or, better said, swim (on the high seas!) together. Following the example of Jesus, walking on water, guided by the Spirit, and cared by our Merciful Father, we want to keep sailing, in this time of so many liquid tides; we newly head towards the other shore, where the Global Compact on Education is already being fallowed. We know that, if we want to go the distance, we need to keep swimming slowly; we are convinced that the only way to understand if we are really moving ahead, is to know if with and among us also the most marginalized, those that our society rejects, are moving ahead.



WOMEN IN A SYNODAL CHURCH.
SYNODALITY AND THE INCLUSION OF
WOMEN IN ECCLESIAL DELIBERATION
AND DECISION-MAKING

Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ

Nathalie Becquart, Under-Secretary for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, is a French Catholic religious sister and member of the Congregation of Xavières. She earned a master's degree in Management at HEC Paris. Becquart studied philosophy and theology at the Centre Sévres of Paris and sociology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS). Sister Becquart specialized in ecclesiology at Boston College, with research on synodality. She was appointed a consultor to the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church in 2019 and named one of its undersecretaries in 2021. From 2008 to 2018 she oversaw the National Service for the Evangelization of Young People and for Vocations (SNEJV) within the Bishops' Conference of France.

Original in English

Synodality has become for many a buzzword! In different countries now, for instance, many initiatives and publications advocate the implementation at all levels of a more synodal Church. That is good news as Pope Francis fosters synodality as a major axis of his pontificate as a new style of being the Church in the 21st Century. As announced on March 7 2020, Pope Francis has chosen “*For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission*” as the theme for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.¹ This means that all the baptized are called to be promoters and actors of synodality, especially women who, with young people, are often the first to call for a more synodal Church.

Therefore, synodality comes to empower all the People of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they can discern in common how to meet the missionary challenges of today's world. It is a Christian way of life and a practice marked by listening and discernment. It is a spirituality which requires attitudes of faith and trust (in God, in others), of mutual listening and humility, of dialogue and of freedom to seek the truth. It is a matter of developing a true culture of encounter in the service of the common good, in welcoming and respecting differences with the conviction that the Spirit speaks in each person and that we

can only discern the calls of the Spirit together in this mutual listening.

In fact, the last two synods of bishops highlighted the topic of women in a synodal Church. A synodal Church by its very definition is a Church that is both male and female. A synodal church is an inclusive Church which transcends the limits of hierarchy, culture, sex, and the limits of a merely human vision of reality, because synodality is the challenge of God that all in the Church might be protagonists and discern together voice of the Holy Spirit.

To put it in a nutshell synodality means moving from the “I” to the “we,” rediscovering the primacy of the ecclesial “we” of the community, an open, inclusive community that enables men and women to walk together with Christ at the center. Synodality.

This article describes a synodal Church and explains how this includes women in the process of synodality by fostering a vision of a synodal Church that is relational, inclusive, dialogic, discerning, generative and pluricultural. Thus, a synodal Church is a renewed missionary Church and a Church of participation and co-responsibility trying to live deliberation and decision-making beyond traditional sacramental roles, since its life is not predetermined but lived and experienced in every ecclesial space open to the world.

Understanding the meaning of ‘synodality’

What exactly is synodality? What vision of the Church does it express? What practices does it call for? Often, to put it simply, synodality is presented according to the etymology of the word synod, which derives from the Greek *sun-odos*, that is to say, ‘walking together’, specifically ‘walking together’ in listening to the Spirit. But synodality, an ancient notion whose Latin equivalent *concilium* (in English Council) designates an assembly of bishops, is a rich and polyform notion that has no completely settled definition, for synodality is a *modus vivendi et operandi*:

This modus vivendi et operandi works through the community listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles.²

Synodality, so to speak, is a style, a practice, a way of being Church in history “in the image of Trinitarian communion” as Pope Francis tells us:

... the practice of synodality, traditional but always to be renewed, is the implementation, in the history of the People of God on their journey, of the Church as a mystery of communion, in the image of Trinitarian communion. As you know, this theme is very close to my heart: synodality is a style, it is walking together, and it is what the Lord expects of the Church in the third millennium.³

This ancient notion was in fact characteristic of the early Church because, in the first centuries, many local synods and councils were organized to allow the

assembled bishops to discuss and discern the decisions to be taken in a context marked by controversies and heresies that had to be resolved. With the historian John O'Malley, one can recognize that "from a historical viewpoint, traditional Church governance was synodal governance;" more precisely, "on both the local and the church-wide level, traditional church governance was synodal, that is, collegial."⁴

If synodality has its roots in the Bible, and in particular in the oft-quoted source-reference that is the 'Council' of Jerusalem in Acts 15, which is regarded as the 'paradigmatic model'⁵ of all subsequent councils, in its modern vision and reappropriation, it is considered and developed today as a fruit of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, the institution of the Synod of Bishops in September 1965 by Pope Paul VI, at the opening of the fourth and last session of the Council, was intended to be an expression of synodality and a means to follow-up the experience of collegiality lived and desired by the Council Fathers.⁶

Applying synodality

Today, at this current stage of the reception of Vatican II, in the historical context that is ours, we are called to strengthen and deploy synodality at all levels of the Church. As Pope Francis states, it is clear *that*:

*... we must move forward on this path. The world in which we live, and to which we are called to love and serve even in its contradictions, requires the Church to strengthen synergies in all areas of its mission. The way of synodality is precisely what God expects of the Church of the third millennium.*⁷

In light of the foregoing, we are all invited to live our Christian faith in this synodal style, which is a missionary style, to proclaim the Gospel to men and women of this time. It is, first of all, a question of giving life to synod institutions that are not only the Synod of Bishops or the diocesan synod, but also a diocesan or parochial pastoral council, a priestly council, a local, provincial or general chapter for religious communities, general assemblies and the councils of ecclesial movements ... As Pope Francis tells us:

*To be a Church is to be a community that walks together. It's not enough to have a synod, you have to be a synod. The Church needs an intense inner exchange: a living dialogue between the pastors and between them and the faithful.*⁸

Synodality, therefore, **is a missionary style that consists of both a way of life and a practice marked by listening and discernment.**

To apply synodality day by day, it is necessary to integrate and live a particular spirituality that **requires attitudes of faith** and trust (in God, in others), **listening and humility**, dialogue, **and freedom** to seek the truth. Such spirituality nurtures **a true culture of encounter at the service of the common good**, accepting and respecting differences with the conviction that the Spirit speaks in each person and that we can only discern the calls of the Spirit together in this

mutual listening. Synodality means moving from ‘I’ to ‘we’ rediscovering the primacy of the ecclesial ‘we’ of an open and inclusive community that walks together with Christ in the center. **By putting Christ and others at the center, synodality builds us as the People of God.**

Women and a Synodal Church

In what ways is synodality relevant to women? As mentioned in our introduction, the last two synods have talked a lot about the issue of women. The Final Documents of the Synod of Youth and the Synod on the Amazon contain strong words calling, on the one hand, **to combat all discrimination against women** in society and, on the other hand, **to give more responsibility to women in the Church.** Thus, in paragraph 13 of the Final Document of the Synod of Young People: *“The Bible presents man and woman as equal companions before God (cf. Gn 5:2): any domination and discrimination based on sex offend human dignity;”* or again in **paragraph 148:**

A Church seeking to live a synodal style may not do without reflection on the condition and role of women within it and, consequently, also in society. Young women and men ask for it very strongly. The reflections developed need to be implemented through a work of courageous cultural conversion and change in daily pastoral practice. An area of particular importance in this regard is the presence of women in ecclesial bodies at all levels, especially in positions of responsibility, and the participation of women in ecclesial decision-making processes, respecting the role of ordained ministry. It is a duty of justice, inspired both by the way Jesus related to the men and women of his time, and to the importance of the role of certain female figures in the Bible, in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church.⁹

In the same vein, the Synod on the Amazon called for the Church to consult women, and to recognize and strengthen their participation in **decision-making processes.**¹⁰ The Final Document of this Panamazon Synod even calls for an instituted ministry of ‘women community leadership’ in an important paragraph titled *c. The time for women’s presence:*

§102. Seeing the concrete suffering of women who are victims of physical, moral and religious violence, including femicide, the Church commits to defend their rights and recognizes them as protagonists and guardians of creation and of our common home. We recognize the ministry that Jesus reserved for women. It is necessary to promote the formation of women in biblical theology, systematic theology and canon law, valuing their presence in organizations and leadership within the Church environment and beyond. We want to strengthen family ties, especially for migrant women. We assure women’s place in leadership and formation. We ask that the Motu Proprio of St. Paul VI, Ministeria quaedam (1972), be revised, so that women who have been properly trained and prepared can receive the ministries of Lector and Acolyte, among others to be developed. In the new contexts of evangelization and pastoral ministry in the Amazon, where the

majority of Catholic communities are led by women, we ask that an instituted ministry of “women community leadership” be created and recognized as part of meeting the changing demands of evangelization and care for communities. ¹¹

This synodal path of the Church is based on greater reciprocity within a relational approach that cannot disconnect the leaders from the members of the community they serve. The next Synod of Bishops – *For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission* - will be a gathering built on two years of preparation, with the participation at the grassroots of the faithful in a long consultation process in every country to discern our priorities. It is a process ending with delegates of Bishops from all over the world spending a month with the Pope. Not many world leaders spend a month devoted to such an exchange, and I hope it can inspire other bodies.

By putting Christ and others at the center, synodality builds us up as the People of God. Therefore we can understand and underline how the ‘journeying’ together, men and women, is a key issue for synodality. The difference between men and women is a mystery, it is an ‘elusive’ difference that is a kind of matrix of all the differences. The way of thinking about and dealing with this difference highlights the equality of all the baptized that lies at the heart of synodality. Thus, men and women in a synodal church must find ways of implementing and articulating both baptismal equality and the difference of the sexes. The final document of the Synod on Youth offers guidance on this matter: §13, *Men and women*:

We cannot neglect the difference between men and women with their specific gifts, perceptions and life experiences. This difference can give rise to forms of domination, exclusion and discrimination from which every society, including the Church, needs to be freed.

The Bible presents man and woman as partners equal in God’s sight (cf. Gen 5:2); all domination and discrimination based on sex is thus an offence against human dignity. The Bible also presents the difference between the sexes as a mystery constitutive of our humanity, one that cannot be reduced to stereotypes. The relation between man and woman is understood in terms of a vocation to live together in reciprocity and dialogue, in communion and fruitfulness (cf. Gen 1:27-29; 2:21-25) in every area of human experience: living as a couple, work, education and so forth. God has entrusted the earth to the covenant of man and woman.

The idea that synodality is necessary to ‘repair the Church’ is also becoming more acute. This requires other ecclesial practices that are more collegial, more dialogical, more participative, more inclusive, allowing all - men and women, young and old - to be actors, and the laity to be associated with the decision-making processes. Reconstructing the Church in this synodal style so that it is more evangelical, more missionary, and more synodal requires that the smallest, the weakest, the poorest, and the most wounded be associated in this search. In order to ‘repair’ the Church, but even more so to witness to Christ in the cultures

and languages of the 21st century, the baptized, all missionary disciples, whatever their vocation, are called to discern and to trace together the paths of mission. It is therefore a question of finding ways of acting that concretely translate in each context this profound identity of the Church which is 'a missionary communion' rooted in the Trinitarian mystery.

Undoubtedly, women have a central role to play in promoting, with so many lay people who aspire to take their full place in this synodal Church. The key words of these ecclesial practices are, listening, service of all, humility and conversion, participation and co-responsibility. Women immediately bring 'otherness' into the clerical system and carry a desire for collaboration in reciprocity with men for greater pastoral fruitfulness. Among them are religious, because of their experience of fraternal community life, of community discernment, of obedience lived as 'a common listening to the Spirit.'

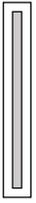
Thus they will help to promote an understanding of the Church as a generative Church, as an ecclesio-genesis, it is about coming together and being formed as a people, the People of God. That is to say a relational and creative Church always on the move, a Church on a paschal journey.

Final thoughts

In conclusion, this brief reflection on the role of women in a synodal Church has sought not to give rigid models of a synodal Church, nor to give prepared answers as to what a synodal Church is. Rather, by understanding the role of women as central to a Church which is relational, inclusive, dialogical, discerning, generative, and pluricultural, we can start to live as a *Church which 'goes forth'* in a process where men and women walk the road of Emmaus together in the hope of recognising the risen Jesus on a path of healing and reconciliation. 'To breathe together' men and women, pastors and laity in a spirit of partnership and co-responsibility for the mission of the Church, we need to experience trust and conversion. Then we may transition from a pattern of domination and competition that characterizes the patriarchal mentality, to a pattern of reciprocity and cooperation between all the missionary disciples animated by the desire to share the joy of the Gospel, a joy to be shared with the whole world.

¹ As announced on March 7 2020, Pope Francis has chosen *For a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission* as the theme for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/07/0145/00318.html>

- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Francis, *Address to members of the International Theological Commission*, November 29 2019.
- 4 O'Malley, John, *When Bishops Meet: an essay comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2019, 58.
- 5 Meloni Alberto and Scatena Silvia (eds.), *Synod and Synodality. Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism*, LIT Verlag, Münster 2005, 113.
- 6 If synodality and collegiality participate in the same "dynamism of communion" that constitutes the Church, in the technical sense, today, we distinguish between collegiality - in the sense of episcopal collegiality as reintroduced at Vatican II - and synodality, which is no longer the expression of episcopal collegiality alone but involves all the faithful.
- 7 Francis, *Address of Pope Francis commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.
- 8 Francis, *Address for the Audience with the Major Archbishop, the Metropolitan and the Permanent Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church*, July 5 2019
- 9 Final Document of the Synod on Young People, §148.
- 10 Final Document of the Pan-Amazon Synod §101
- 11 Final Document of the Pan-Amazon Synod §102



THE VOICE OF CONSECRATED WOMEN ON THE ROAD OF SYNODALITY

Sr. Liliana Franco Echeverri, ODN

Liliana Franco Echeverri, Sister of the Order of the Company of Mary. She is a social worker at the University of Antioquia, with a master's degree in biblical theology, and currently a candidate for a doctorate in theology at the same University. She is Provincial of the Company of Mary, in the Province of the Pacific and President of CLAR.

Original in Spanish

Caring for life should be the horizon that inspires, encourages, and guides our consecration.

Life is a gift, full of possibilities, but also inhabited by fragility and vulnerability; therefore, it is necessary to diligently take care of it.

Care arises when someone's existence matters. It is, then, that we dedicate ourselves to him, to participate in his destiny, his search, his sufferings, and his successes, in short, in his life. This is compassion.

Now, compassion implies a way of relating; it consists fundamentally in perceiving the suffering of others as one's own, that is, in the ability to internalize the suffering of another human being and living it as if it were one's own experience. Empathizing with someone is a habit of the heart. Compassion supposes a commitment to solidarity.

Compassion leads us to embrace vulnerability, our own and that of others. It leads us to open our eyes and to perceive the situation of suffering in which other human beings are living. Showing compassion for someone does not mean replacing or deciding for them. It implies putting yourself in his shoes, without stealing his identity, without invading his territory. Trust is essential in any exercise of care. Trust someone means believing in him, placing oneself in his hands, putting oneself at his disposal.

Starting from the logic of care, the most important thing will be to take care of the GIFT and the RELATION: There the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano wrote a story that I really like, and it seems to me that it beautifully expresses what is enlivened when we talk about synodality:

A man from the town of Negua, on the coast of Colombia, was able to ascend to the heights of heaven.

When he returned, he recounted. He said that, from up there, he had contemplated human life. And he said that we are a sea of little fires.

“That is the world,” he revealed. A lot of people, a sea of little fires.

Each person shines with their own light among all the others. There are not two equal fires. There are big fires, and small fires, and fires of all colors. There are people with serene fire, who do not even notice the wind, and people with crazy fire, who fill the air with sparks. Some fires, silly fires, do not illuminate or burn; but others burn life so eagerly that you cannot look at them without blinking, and whoever approaches them, is set on fire.

The key to walking together in synodality is to join little fires, until something new burns and what is most genuine is cared for and strengthened.

Synodality means exercising ourselves in the pedagogy of care. The certainty that accompanies us at CLAR is that every relationship is based on love and enriched by this bond; it is there that joy increases and valid channels are opened for communication, exchange, and collective construction.

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, in his rereading of *Vita Consecrata*, expresses this:

Consecrated Life does not aim to isolate itself from other forms of Christian life: it is called to interrelate with them and form part of the “ecclesial we,” of the body of Christ that is the Church. So that, in this way, the good of one member contributes to the wealth and well-being of the entire body.

Everyone in the Church participates in a common dignity, everyone is called to live in holiness and to cooperate in the edification of the body of Christ; but the Spirit grants different gifts. Thus, the Church is an organic communion of various vocations, charisms, ministries.

It is evident that, today, Consecrated Life shows that it is more fragile, smaller, more wounded and limited, with fewer trenches and security; and, therefore, it is more apt to set its heart on what is fundamental and so, with humble daring, it can recreate in the Spirit of God, capable of making all things

new. Pope Francis, consecrated by vocation and conviction, knows well that our moment is fruitful and that, in this long night, only the centrality in Jesus Christ will restore to Religious Life its mystical, prophetic, and missionary identity.

We lose vitality when we melt placidly with the institutional and forget the essence, homogenizing ourselves in molds and forms that crop us. Fruitfulness comes to the Church, when she is ready to meet, when she welcomes difference and enables the development of gifts and charisms in diversity and complementarity. We achieve vitality when we transcend the idolatry of individualism and dispose ourselves to the art of the common, enabling listening that converts, the word that energizes, the commitment that opens new paths.

A specific nuance of human existence, and also of our consecration, is community life. In the charism, which has been granted to each of us, there is a tendency to building with others, in complementarity and co-responsibility; and that requires openness to diversity, the ability to unite rhythms, to combine languages, cultures, sensibilities. and visions. It supposes a new contemplative look that enables us to discover the good, the truth, and the beauty alive in every human being.

In a world of polarization and individualism, communion is the greatest witness that we can give to our fellow citizens. The utopia of brotherhood must be, for us, a horizon of meaning; and that requires an unlimited dose of tenderness. Only the daily exercise of tenderness will make us more human and reflect more clearly the face of God among us.

Nothing that closes us in on ourselves and protects us is evangelical. What characterizes the Christian is the path, openness, the gift of the other, of the radically Other.

We are called to unity: *May they all be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.*

Unity is an attribute that configures identity, that preserves the essence, that ensures harmony, that favors passing the test of time. Where there is unity there is harmony, communion in values and criteria. Unity does not exclude difference, and it has an inalienable harmony that comes from the encounter, the communication, and the bond. It requires relationship and the face to face of gratuity.

It is built, and in it, there is room for vulnerability, fragility, and limits; it supposes the permanent exercise of reconciliation and forgiveness and requires disarming and learning. It is not possible where there is pride, stiff spirals of

power, and even less where there is no flexibility and openness to the Spirit.

On this pilgrimage with others in the Church, we are also called to advance intercongregationally, in a charismatic dialogue that makes it possible for the richness of the intuition of each founder to add other sensibilities, with the awareness that each charism is a gift for the Church and a gift of the Church for all.

The testimony of the friendship between the brothers and sisters of different congregations, the shared efforts to conduct common projects, and the tireless search for answers to the challenges of the historical moment, already all clearly show that God is among us to make us one. The horizon is that of journeying as brothers and sisters, in gratuitousness, welcoming our differences, promoting the best of each one of us, building a common project, singing the melody of brotherhood and sisterhood.

The Theology of Consecrated Life has before it the challenge of scrutinizing at the source, at the origin of the founding charisms, to unravel the potential for originality and vitality that inhabits them and makes them relevant and necessary at every moment in history. The charism, which was given to us freely and in abundance, commits us to walking with coherency and authenticity, to living in the truth that liberates, to speaking words that stimulate and encourage, to being with those who seek justice and peace, to communing with those who believe, and to sharing with those who find it hard to believe. The charism that gives us identity reaches its fullness when it meets other charisms, and together they show what is most typical and original of the Kingdom: the common table, where there is room for everyone, the one that makes us the Church, the People of God.

This is how Pope Francis puts it, inviting us to expand the tent, to go further:

No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening, and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the disease of self-absorption.

Consecrated men and women are also called to true synergy with all other vocations in the Church, beginning with priests and the lay faithful, in order to spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries.

The Pope also invites Bishops to recognize in the various charisms gifts that enrich the Church and to place themselves before the consecrated men

and women with a gaze capable of valuing and thanking the gift that their person and their charism bring to the whole of the Church and the processes of evangelization:

We bishops must understand that consecrated persons are not helpful materials, but rather that they are charisms that enrich the Church. Dioceses need these charisms. The diocesan insertion of religious communities is important, just as is the bishop's recognition and respect of their charisms. In general, conflicts arise when there is a lack of dialogue. (82° USG General Assembly 2013)

The certainty that, as the People of God, we are called to travel on new paths, places us believers in the place of listening, the only place from which we will be able to evaluate, understand, and assume the social, cultural, and ecological challenges that this historical moment poses to the Church and that will require her to develop a dialogical attitude, invest in new relationships, and set out on the path with others, based on the experience that only dialogue makes us grow. Given our identity as ecclesial subjects and with the awareness that, through baptism and the common priesthood, we have the same dignity, we feel called to contribute to the configuration of a more synodal Church.

Setting out with others, in the present day of the Church and of Consecrated Life, will lead us to build together, and we can do this from the three points of communion:

Belonging: Knowing that we are linked to something or someone that transcends us. The experience of belonging gives us identity; it is a matter of love, of a bond around which the life project is built. The awareness that we are a part makes us vitally responsible, and out of love, we become guardians of the gift, custodians of the treasure, tireless sowers of all seeds that anticipate abundance for whom or what we are vitally rooted. It is a question of roots.

Participation: What is common puts us in the place of participation, of collective construction. It is the dynamic in which everyone's voice resonates differently and, therefore, complementarily. The spectator's passivity has no place in this logic, nor does the petty judgment of those who only criticize. Participation implies giving oneself, the consciousness of being an architect and a builder, preparing oneself for processes that require dedication and perseverance, for the gratuity and disinterest of the Kingdom.

Patience: without this gift, nothing that lasts is possible. Everything really important takes time. Making the common happen supposes believing in the value of the processes, and they imply time and accompaniment. Patience

is the disposition that allows what is common to burst in and lets us get out of schemes that, disguised in the garb of efficiency, limit wisdom, corner beauty, exclude, and do not give rise to the healthy and necessary difference.

God does not stop creating and recreating; He also does this at night and, with this conviction, fashion our hope. That is why Pope Francis insists, saying:

We must not be afraid to discard the “old wineskins”: that is, not to renew those habits and those structures which, in the life of the Church and thus also in consecrated life, we recognize as no longer corresponding to what God asks of us today in order to help his Kingdom move forward in the world: the structures that give us false protection and that condition the vitality of charity; the habits that distance us from the flock to which we are sent and prevent us from hearing the cry of those who await the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Hope has to be reborn and with it, the answers will be made new, those that allow us to rethink at the rhythm of the Spirit and grace. Now, according to the Pope,

This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.

(Witnesses of Joy C.A. 2014)

It is another logic, that of the Spirit, which always takes us beyond what we are capable of calculating or assuming. The one that puts us in the place of the small and makes us value what is free, celebrate friendship and take care of the community. The one that throws us down unknown paths and demands that we dare to engage in the unsuspected events of the Kingdom, receiving them from the hand of God. It is the logic of those who trust.

The synodal style is, at this historical moment, the new way of being and making the Church. Journeying together is the condition for listening to reality and responding in an evangelical way to the challenges of this historical moment.

This, as Carlos Martínez Oliveiras points out, in his book *Synodus*,
from the certainty that the Church must be articulated internally in a

way that facilitates the responsibility of all in order to make herself present in a new way in history, in the world, in society. Synodality will be precisely a necessary or, at least, a possible way of combining diversity, harmonizing difference, and balancing opposites. Anchored in the certainty that the ecclesiology of communion appears to us as a constitutive and necessary element in the Church.

Today of the Church and society demand that we exercise ourselves in the prophecy of the community, walking with the awareness that we are God's people and, audaciously positioning ourselves humbly, unmasking the tangles of power that dehumanize. This means going back to the Gospel's originality and opting for the love that dignifies. Our commitment to the utopia of fraternity is the most authentic testimony that we can give to humanity today.

At this juncture, the mission of women in the Church becomes clearer. Called to be, within the ecclesial fabric, a sacrament of communion, a bridge that favors encounters, a womb in which a new way of relating is fertilized and the art of accompaniment prioritized. The synodal spirit to which we are committed, supposes the participation of women in the spaces and structures of the Church, in discernment and decision-making.

It is up to us, in Religious Life, to be guardians of life, and that will mean becoming experts in the art of caring. Artisans of care.

May each one, each one of us, add her fire to make possible the blaze of communion, which illuminates and gives others reasons to believe and hope.



50 YEARS OF "JUSTICE IN THE WORLD": THE SYNOD THAT "CATALYZED" CONSECRATED LIFE

Sr. Anne Béatrice Faye, CIC

Sr. Anne Béatrice Faye, CIC, is a Sister of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Castres. Graduated in Philosophy at "Cheik Anta Diop" University of Dakar (Senegal), she is interested in issues related to the promotion of women in the African context. She is a professor of Philosophy and a member of the Association des Théologiens Africains (ATA).

The conference was presented on 21 June 2021 at a Webinar organized by the "Africa Working Group" of the JPIC joint Commission of the UISG and the USG.

Original in French

Introduction

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic today invites us to meet around a virtual table to celebrate a Jubilee: the 50 years of the second post-synodal document *Justice in the World*, the topicality of which concerns us all. At the heart of this health crisis and all the socioeconomic tragedies that we are all experiencing, the opportunity is still offered to me to come back to the relevance of this document as an event that continues to inspire us and push us to action.

Indeed, "we see in the world a set of injustices which constitute the nucleus of today's problems and whose solution requires the undertaking of tasks and functions in every sector of society (...) Our action is to be directed above all at those people and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice."¹

The treatment of the question of Justice, therefore, deserves a "concrete, frank, and generous" look,² like the consideration that the 1971 Synod already gave it. For my part, I have chosen to lucidly rethink justice in Africa. The basic question is always the same: What justice is needed for greater human dignity and promotion of integral development in Africa? In speaking about human dignity,

we are referring to all expressions of fundamental rights, individual freedoms, relations, and well-being at all levels. More concretely, what is the result of these five decades of *Justice in the World* within the Church and our religious Institutes, particularly in Africa?

Globally, the document *Justice in the World* had an immediate, clear, and powerful impact on the congregations. It led to new orientations and displacing the place of mission. Indeed, this Synod was a “catalyst” because it shifted the consecrated life from monastic structures towards a way of life and ministries of proximity to the world’s underprivileged populations. Does this explain the double jubilee, 40 years in 2011 and 50 years today in 2021?

My intervention is not the result of a poll that could reflect all the realities of Africa. It is merely a reflection to share, the fruit of my small experience of mission from Senegal to Burkina Faso via the DRC and other experiences acquired in the different intercultural research groups in which I have been investing myself for a few years.

1. The Referential and Methodological Framework of Our Exchange

To answer these questions, we will begin with an overview of the historical context of the Synod. I would then invite you to a trip to our various institutes, to a survey in the field, not in the secret garden of our general offices or our large institutions, but in the open air, on the border, in the Malian or Libyan desert, in “the belly of the Atlantic”³ with migrants, in the bush, at the market, with young people, women, megacities, in short, at the heart of the daily life of the greatest number of Africans.

In other words, this fiftieth anniversary is fundamentally the time for introspection to question the true reality of the practices of justice on the continent and more particularly in our local churches and our religious institutes. How can the increase in the number of men and women hounded by misery and the worsening of their living conditions be explained, while the number of major projects in the world, the Church, and in particular our Institutes continues to increase? aid to the poor, Justice and Peace commissions, publications, newsletters and reviews, networks and sites, NGOs...? Faced with emergency situations that often require rapid action, should we not review our works of assistance in favor of initiatives aimed at human promotion, in order to avoid permanent dependence?

Finally, we know what characterizes the fifties. At fifty, one gains in depth, wisdom, and experience. Fifty years is the convergence of maturity and available time. Of course, this Jubilee is the opportunity for our Institutes in the Church to revisit our most significant missions, which are sometimes scattered, and to tell their story in order to find the coherence. Inspired by *Justice in the World*, we are going to share together what we can organize at the African level, in each country, diocese, and Institute, not necessarily to provide one or more answers but to suggest some guidelines.

2. An Overview of the Synod's Historical Context and the Reception of *Justice in the World*

You have certainly read the document, and you probably know it better than I do. Yet, let me give a brief overview to situate it in its global and ecclesial context. We will also see its reception and its impact on the continent, in particular starting from the first jubilee of the 40 years also celebrated around a table during a conference held in Rome in November 2011.

2.1 *Justice in the World: Bothersome Questions*

In addition to the clarity of the document with regard to international injustices, let us note some difficulties when it came to the denunciation of injustices directed at particular countries. For example, South Africa for racism, Israel for the seizure of the Holy Places, the Soviet Union for its treatment of Catholics in Ukraine, dictatorship, etc. For the Synod Fathers, the denunciation of particular injustices must be the concern, above all, of the local Churches, directly aware of the situations. In fact, for the bishops, "the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world. Her mission involves defending and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person."⁴ It would be good to prolong the reflection and look at the other questions which have remained unanswered. Yet, how was the document received?

Noticeably, at the beginning it did not have a very deep influence in the Churches of Western countries. The reason is undoubtedly linked to the vigor of the language used to address the rich countries. Certain statements are not acceptable. For example: "We grieve whenever richer nations turn their backs on this ideal goal of worldwide sharing and responsibility." The quest for capital and energy by the richest nations, whether capitalist or socialist, (and the same must be said of the pollution effect caused by the consumption of that capital and that energy in the atmosphere and in the sea) is such that elements essential to life on earth, such as air and water, would be irreparably destroyed if the ever-increasing high level of consumption and contamination spread to the whole of humanity.

The document's impact was, on the contrary, strong in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Much more satisfaction was felt in ecclesial circles directly sensitized to the problems of international economic injustice. It is also worth pointing out a particular influence of *Justice in the World* in many religious institutes. There, it was a very important inspiration for behavior and lifestyle, chapter materials, structures, and spirituality.

This is the occasion to recall here the conference organized by the USG / UISG on November 19th, 2011, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Justice in the World*. As a prelude to this meeting, on August 15th, 2011, Sister Teresa Dagdag, member of the Congregation of Maryknoll Sisters of the Philippines, at the time co-Secretary of the JPIC Commission of the USG / UISG, sent an

important questionnaire out to religious congregations on behalf of the Commission. More than 40 responses to 17 questions were analyzed. They focused on the Synod's relevance, impact, and influence on Consecrated Life, but also the limitations, emerging issues, and concerns. The objective was to collect reflections on the reception of *Justice in the World* and its impact on Consecrated Life. In other words, if the Synod of Bishops on *Justice in the World* had not taken place, would Consecrated Life be the same today?

Father Donal Dorr⁵ and I had the task of answering this question on the occasion of the celebration of this anniversary. 40 years is about 3 generations. We responded on the basis of our personal experiences and our knowledge of the reality of society. For my part, my intervention was oriented towards the great hopes on the African continent. I had entitled it "*Justice in the World: Continuity and Discontinuity in Consecrated Life in Africa.*" It was a very rich moment of exchange around the reception of this document in the Church and religious congregations over the course of four decades.

We concluded that the document *Justice in the World* is part of the Church's heritage. It strengthens our JPIC ministry and offers continuity with the Scriptures. It also clarifies this paradigm shift. The Church is now not an end in herself, but she is on a mission, to bring about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of justice and peace. It is by being in solidarity with the poor that we will know God. Finally, justice, peace, and love are the characteristics God's reign. In other words, the Church has a specific and proper responsibility, which is identified with her mission to bear witness before the world to the requisite for love and justice contained in the Christian message, a witness that she will have to live out her its own ecclesial institutions and in the life of Christians.⁶

Thus, the promotion of justice is an absolute requisite of the service of faith, just as the Synod had qualified the "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" as "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."

3. A Field Survey in the New Africa: The Side of Governance and Politicians

- *Economic and political challenges*
- *The challenges of women in society*
- *Ecological challenges*
- *Educational challenges – youth*
- *The challenge of mobility inside and outside the continent.*
- *Sociocultural and interreligious challenges*
- *The challenge of violence in all its forms*
- *Ethical challenges*
- *The challenges of modernization*

3.1 The Side of Political Governance

Does it make sense for a president to spend billions to buy himself a boat and

a new plane, while much of his country is still completely enclaved? Does it make sense for a president to organize social gatherings on the French Riviera and to hand out envelopes stuffed with banknotes to his guests, while the hospitals in his country do not even have cotton? Does it make sense for entire villages cede their plots of land, for small amounts, to multinationals, civil servants, and traders in order to meet their current needs? Their land has been sold without their knowing it.

Does it make sense for a sick president on the verge of death to vote in his car, thus ignoring all the basic rules of democracy? Unfortunately, the list of these inconsistencies can be further extended.

Let us continue our survey in the field and see what is happening on the side of the education of young people, women, and the environment.

3.2 Meeting a Young Graduate: Symbol of Vulnerability and Courage.

Justice in the World makes us focus on the wealth that the young represent in Africa. Today, this wealth is qualified as a demographic dividend. What efforts are being made to reduce this paradox, through public policies? What is the compass that the Church can offer young people so that they do not get lost? In other words, what does she have to offer them? How can we credibly proclaim Christ to them? Aware of the importance of mutual understanding for lasting peace among all the children of the earth, Amadou Hampâté Bâ deemed it necessary to address African youth in these terms:

Young people of Africa and of the world, destiny asks you, in this end of the twentieth century and at the dawn of a new era, to be a bridge thrust between two worlds: the world of the past, where old civilizations yearn to hand down their treasures to you before disappearing, and the world of the future, full of uncertainty and difficulties, no doubt, but also rich with new adventures and fascinating experiences. You must take up the challenge and make sure that there is no mutilating rupture, but a serene continuation, so that one era can fertilize the other. If conflicts threaten you, remember the virtues of dialogue and palaver!

One of the most striking paradoxes in any African country is this: Africa is a continent of the future with a young people who represents an essential asset for its sustainable development, its peace, and its prosperity. Yet these young people are the most neglected. Let us meet some of them.

Countless young people on our continent are going through situations that seriously affect them. These are, among other things, the after-effects of poverty that limit the harmonic growth of their lives and create exclusion. The case we are going to present reflects what they are experiencing all over the continent. You perhaps know others. We can share them in the third moment of our exchange.

ADOUMARINE⁷, an unemployed graduate from the University of Lagos (Nigeria), explains that you often meet young Nigerian graduates who do odd jobs. "They clean floor in hotels, sell phone recharge cards near gas stations, or work

in factories or just as street vendors.” One of them sells grilled meat on the street. Listen carefully to what he did. He made photocopies of his engineering degree and uses them as packaging for his clients. Underemployment is a severe problem, which veils the reality of so many young people.

Millions of them are left employed, in precarity, and disenchanting; daily, some fall into radicalization or take the road of exodus at the risk of their lives, their freedom, their dignity even to the point of the ultimate humiliation of being sold and enslaved, as we recently saw in Libya.

These experiences and many others that you know or experience, prompt me to ask you this: Dear participants in this exchange, how are universities in Africa adapting to different socio-political and professional constraints? What future do they have in store for Africa? How can they contribute to inclusive growth? How can one participate in the knowledge economy, for the justice of all?⁸ Justice in the world, the radical transformation of the world, at the Lord’s Passover, gives full meaning to human efforts, and in particular those of young people, to alleviate injustice, violence, and hatred, and to verify the progress of all and, simultaneously, in justice, freedom, fraternity, and love.

3.3 The Dignity of Women in Africa: A Call for Justice.

René Laurentin notes in his book on the Synod *Justice in the World* that “Mrs. Barbara Ward wrote the most important part of the summary of the debates... This is the first time, he adds, that a woman has played this role of kingpin in the elaboration of a document emanating from the supreme authority of the Church.”⁹ It is not surprising that *Justice in the World* urges “that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church” and proposes “that this matter be subjected to a serious study employing adequate means: for instance, a mixed commission of men and women, religious and lay people, of differing situations and competence.”¹⁰ The Church recognizes the right of all to have sufficient freedom of expression and thought, which also presupposes each person’s right to be heard, in a spirit of dialogue that guarantees legitimate diversity in the Church.

Yet we must recognize that, in our daily situation, most African women struggle against all kinds of forces that strip them of their personality and prevent them from taking their destiny in hand. They produce and sell, for example, 80% of the food but, before the law, they are not considered capable of owning the fields they cultivate. Remember that most of them do this work without modern tools, without training, and without essential amenities.

There are experiences that are contrary to justice: in the collaboration with women, the latter are often reduced to a lower rank. This is why the role of women would be more effective if the Church and the family were to give them a more visible mission or involve them more forthrightly, because they would humanize African societies much more. It is common knowledge that, in Africa, women are an active part of the Church. They are the primary collaborators of the evangelizing

mission. They can be considered as the backbone of Christian communities, if it is known that they do most of the organizational work. Across the continent, thousands of women religious proclaim the Kingdom of God through concrete acts of compassion. Despite this, the question remains: To what extent is the dignity of these women honored, recognized, and celebrated in the Church and in society?

The question of the dignity of women is sometimes linked to that of ecology. Indeed, women in rural areas depend heavily on their natural environment. Guardians of life, they are the first to be affected by climate-related damage or the scarcity of natural resources. This is our last point.

3.4 The Question of Eco-Justice

The question of the integrity of creation had already been incisively perceived by *Justice in the World*, which targeted the richest countries as responsible for environmental pollution. "The demand for resources and energy by the richer nations, whether capitalist or socialist, and such are the effects of dumping by them in the atmosphere and the sea that irreparable damage would be done to the essential elements of life on earth, such as air and water, if their high rates of consumption and pollution, which are constantly on the increase, were extended to the whole of humanity."¹¹ "The ecological crisis and the cry of the poor who suffer the consequences of environmental degradation calls us all to stop and [...] reflect seriously on the way in which our functional values driving our everyday decisions and actions remain consumerist at the core."¹²

In Africa, environmental issues are intrinsically linked to natural resources and poverty. Rich in mineral resources, it is nevertheless the continent which has the highest percentage of poor people.¹³ Environmental ethics must, therefore, go hand in hand with environmental justice, so that equitable distribution of natural resources and, hence, the fight against inequalities and poverty may be fostered.

Africa is often presented as the place of expression of these inequalities and poverty. Indeed, some "businessmen and women, rulers and economic groups who, under the pretext of reducing poverty and working for the development of poor populations, engage in exploitation programs, rob the peasants of their property. land, destroy forests, pollute the environment and cause unprecedented desertification." Faced with these serious attacks against the human person and against nature, "the Church must [...] challenge those in power, in order to create a new ecological awareness which is expressed in concrete actions."¹⁴

The urgent challenge of safeguarding our common home includes the concern to unite the whole human family in the quest for sustainable and integral development, because we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; He never revokes His plan of love; He does not regret that He created us.

Humanity still has the capacity to work together to build our common home. When Pope Francis talks about protecting the common home, that is the planet, he is referring to that minimum of universal awareness and the sense of mutual

concern that can still exist among people.

Here are some issues, to guide reflection, knowing that a broad awareness is already being raised in the different religious institutes.

- Making the issue of eco-justice a transversal axis of our mission.
- Sustainability should be an objective of our individual and collective activities,
- In all our communities and places of work, especially in our formation houses, there should be a simple and constant practice of recycling perishable and non-perishable materials according to the three Rs: reduce, recycle, and reuse.
- It would be desirable to prioritize the purchase of local products and participate in social movements that raise environmental awareness in order to influence public policies.

For his part, Pope Francis indicates the kind of change humanity needs to face the challenge of the hour. He calls first to develop “a new lifestyle” in a world where “the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products.”¹⁵ He also underscores the importance of the educational challenge, which must not only create an “ecological citizenship” but also cultivate “sound virtues,” which are the condition of “a selfless ecological commitment.”¹⁶

Conclusion

No Church document has so strongly focused on the troubling international injustices, from which the world has not yet emerged. One has the feeling that it is the problematic of international justice as men of the Third World perceive it that dominates the synodal debate. Indeed, we can read: “In the last twenty-five years a hope has spread through the human race that economic growth would bring about such a quantity of goods that it would be possible to feed the hungry at least with the crumbs falling from the table, but this has proved a vain hope in underdeveloped areas and in pockets of poverty in wealthier areas, because of the rapid growth of population and of the labor force, because of rural stagnation and the lack of agrarian reform, and because of the massive migratory flow to the cities, where the industries, even though endowed with huge sums of money, nevertheless provide so few jobs that not infrequently one worker in four is left unemployed.”¹⁷

This situation has led the Church to listen with a humble and sincere heart to the Word of God, which shows new ways of action for justice in the world.

The biblical message and the mission of the Church, with a theological reflection on the tie between hope and the temporal liberation of humanity.

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation. Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures,

and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church's vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted."¹⁸

In the face of the current injustices, the document ends with the practice of justice by offering

some paths for witnessing and effective action, especially through education.

For some, for example, this action is part of social and political struggles, in which Christians bear witness to the Gospel, demonstrating that, in history sources, there are of progress distinct from the struggle, such as love and the law. This priority of love in history leads other Christians to prefer the path of nonviolent action.

Let us note that the first sessions of the debate (20-22 October) were each opened, not by bishops, but by lay experts who were members to the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace: Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), a renowned English economist who taught in the United States after working in Ghana until 1961; then, Candido Mendes de Almeida, rector of a university institute in Rio de Janeiro; and, finally, Kinhide Mushakoji, professor at Sofia University in Tokyo.

From *Justice in the World*, we retain three attitudes: listening, reflection, and dialogue. Listening allows us to hear the reflection on these major questions concerning the world, our continent, every region, and each country that composes it up. We all know that, in Africa, the best position for listening is sitting. "Sitting down and listening to others," the Pope tells us, is a characteristic gesture of human encounter, a paradigm of a receptive attitude on the part of those who receive the other, give them attention, "welcoming them into their lives."¹⁹ The second attitude helps us to better understand the changes that have taken place in our world and especially in Africa. And this leads us to the third attitude and to proposing a path of transformations and some guidelines for action.²⁰

By re-reading *Justice in the World*, "we have been able to perceive the serious injustices which are building around the human world a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom, and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and more loving world."²¹ We also realized that many initiatives have accompanied the most disadvantaged with the aim of promoting greater justice.

¹ *Justice in the World*, no. 20. – The English translation of this document is available on: <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>.

² On the Second General Assembly Synod of Bishops "Justitia in Mundo." The promotion of Justice in the world, 30 November 1971, in: *Le discours social de l'Eglise catholique de Léon XIII à Benoît*

- XVI, Présentation de Jean-Yves Calvez, Bayard culture, 2009, 609.
- ³ Fatou DIOME, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Anne Carrière, 2003, 256.
- ⁴ *Justice in the World*, no. 37
- ⁵ Donal DORR, *Spirituality and Justice*, Orbis Books, 1985.
- ⁶ *Justice in the World*, nos. 39, 79.
- ⁷ ADOUMARINE is an acronym formed of the initials of the names of many young people, men and women, who are unemployed or leaving Africa for other places. It represents all those who travel in unimaginable conditions only to find themselves living in situations worse than those they leave behind, if in the meantime they have not died in the Sahara Desert or the Mediterranean.
- ⁸ Abdou Salam SALL, *La gouvernance universitaire: Une expérience africaine*, CODESRIA, Dakar, 2016, 216.
- ⁹ René LAURENTIN, *Réorientation de l'Eglise après le troisième synode*, Seuil, Paris, 1972, 152. In *Assemblée Générale. Justitia in Mundo. La promotion de la Justice dans le monde, 30 novembre 1971*, Présentation de Jean-Yves Calvez, 609.
- ¹⁰ *Justice in the World*, nos. 45-46.
- ¹¹ *Justice in the World*, no. 11.
- ¹² This is recalled by the Social Justice Secretariat of the Society of Jesus in "Special Report on Ecology. Healing a Broken World," *Promotio Iustitiae*, no. 106, 2011/2, 42. – This document is available for download at: <http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/pjnew/PJ106ENG.pdf>.
- ¹³ Cf. PNUÉ (2006), *Africa Environment Outlook 2: Our Environment, United Nations Environment Programme* (2006), Nairobi. – This document is available for download at: <https://wedocs.unep.org>.
- ¹⁴ SCEAM, *L'avenir de la famille, notre mission, Contribution à la 14^{ème} Assemblée Générale du Synode des évêques*, SECAM-SCEAM PUBLICATIONS, Accra, 2015, no. 23.
- ¹⁵ FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, no. 203.
- ¹⁶ FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, no. 211.
- ¹⁷ *Justice in the World*, chap. 1
- ¹⁸ *Justice in the World*, nos. 6 and 5.
- ¹⁹ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on Fraternity and Social Friendship, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, no. 48.
- ²⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. (...) (The Christian) community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds."
- ²¹ *Justice in the World*, no. 3.



HOLISTIC FORMATION OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS FOR MISSION IN A FAST CHANGING WORLD

Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR

Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, a Missionary Sister of the Holy Rosary served on her congregation's leadership.

Presently, she is Vice Postulator for the Cause of Canonisation of their founder Bishop Joseph Shanahan CSSp.

She's the author of "Rooted in Christ - Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation". and "Interculturality in Religious Life - A Blessing in Different Colours".

Original in English

Introduction

Two images from the Gospels stand out whenever I reflect on the subject of leadership. The first is where Jesus stooped and washed the feet of his disciples, and urged them to do the same (cf. Jn 13: 3-17): "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (vv. 14, 15). The second is when Jesus went away to lonely places to pray (Matt 14:23; Mk 1:35; Lk 3:21; 6:12; 9:28). At every opportunity, he modelled for his disciples a personal relationship with the Father. He taught them that authority is service, and humility the hallmark of true discipleship.

God chooses and calls anyone according to divine wisdom and design. Saint Paul reminded the Christian community of Corinth that their calling was not out of any merit of theirs, but because of God's intention for the world (cf. 1Cor 1:26-31). This equally applies to the call to leadership in religious congregations – a poignant bell of reminder, lest pride take over the leader's heart and direct his or her thoughts and deeds. To be authentic disciples of Jesus and stewards of Christ's body, leaders of religious congregations are to be grounded in the values of Jesus Christ.

The world is changing fast. The experiences of those who entered religious life about twenty to forty years ago strikingly differ from those of persons

entering in these present times. Leaders today are dealing with a more complex world than that of our forebears. For instance, the new members of religious congregations are mostly children of the cyber-age. They are the generation that grew up with mobile phones, access to internet and social media. Leaders are equally facing many new challenges including those posed by the present Covid-19 pandemic, and struggle to find helpful ways of dealing with them. There is hence, an ever growing need for holistic on-going formation of leaders to adequately prepare them for mission in these challenging times.

I will focus on the following elements in exploring this topic:

- (1) brief reflection on the importance of leadership in the Christian community and Religious Life.
- (2) the graces as well as the challenges of leadership in the Religious Life of today's context
- 3) different dimensions of holistic formation of leaders for effectiveness in their dual vocations of the consecrated life and leadership ministry
- (4) the exercise of leadership in relation to the Evangelical Counsels as an equally essential part of holistic formation of leaders.

(The article will be divided into two parts, and published in two issues of the Bulletin).

FIRST PART

LEADERSHIP: AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Leadership has always been an essential service in the Christian community. From among his many followers Jesus selected twelve apostles with whom he shared more intimately, and commissioned them to go out and spread his message of love. From the twelve, he made Simon Peter the leader and the rock on which to build his Church, which no power of the underworld could overcome (cf. Matt. 16:18). Jesus chose these simple, ordinary people, some were fishermen, not scribes nor doctors of the Law, these simple persons eventually carried on Christ's message of life and bore witness to his Resurrection. This is an example of how God can choose the seemingly "foolish, weak, the lowly and despised things of this world" to shame the wise of the world... (cf. 1 Cor 1:27, 28), so that no one may boast or show pride before God (v.29). Like the call to follow Christ in the Christian life, leadership is equally an invitation, a call within the call to the consecrated life. The religious community of consecrated persons live together while they seek to be faithful to the will of God in their lives, each one playing their own part in the role assigned to them in community. "...while all *the* community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him, *some* are called,

usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide of the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority” (CICLSAL, 2008, p. 3). The goal is to serve Christ’s body following the example of Christ so that all the members will carry on with their roles and not be weighed down by all the needs of the community. In the early Christian community, faced with the challenge of adequate care of the temporal needs of the people especially the widows, the Apostles chose seven men of good repute to serve as deacons. This enabled them to concentrate more fully in the preaching of the Word (cf. Acts 6:1-7).

The Graces of Leadership Ministry

Unquestionably, leadership ministry is challenging. Nevertheless, God is faithful. Whenever a person is called to leadership, God gives the graces needed. In the religious life, the ministry of leadership offers a unique opportunity to serve one’s brothers and sisters - helping to bear their burdens, animating and encouraging them to fully embrace their calling. Exposed to the human struggles, the leader grows in dealing with his or her own personal struggles. Access to the inner workings of other people and how God journeys with them is a great gift that religious leaders are given. Such is a privilege. For this reason, the leader is to handle with respect and dignity the life of those he/she is leading and hold their stories sacred.

Facing the many challenges of leadership can positively stretch and widen the horizons of leaders, leading to growth. Such experiences can motivate the leader to grow in awe of God’s actions in his/her brothers and sisters. Leadership also provides opportunities to be agents of reconciliation and connection with members of the congregation. As a leader, it is not uncommon to bear the brunt of fallout from failure of projects or decisions considered unpopular among the members. Hence, the leader is often faced with the need to always forgive and let go of hurts experienced as a result of these elements of the human condition. Self-transcendence is an important Christian value. Because of the demands of leadership, the leader may often be required to rise above self in dealing especially with leadership related issues.

Conversion and personal transformation are constants in the ministry of religious leadership. With challenging experiences and constant tuning in to the God who has called one to leadership, there is the likelihood of hearing and discerning the ever present call to conversion. In listening to the inner voice of the Spirit dealing with one’s brothers and sisters, the call to conversion can be heard. Sometimes too, personal mistakes or the anger of members towards the leader can act as a catalyst for his or her conversion. It would appear that experiences in leadership help to sanctify and foster growth in leaders. Religious leadership can and does open the doors of the heart to embrace and witness to God’s universal love. In leadership, there are also opportunities for travel. These can equally be a source of grace, which further widens leaders’ view and horizon.

The Challenges faced by Contemporary Religious Leaders

Leadership in every sphere can be quite challenging. We shall look at two major sources of challenge in religious leadership. There are those that arise from within the leader (Internal sources) and others from outside of the leader (External sources).

Internal Sources

Not every challenge faced by a leader is from outside of self. It is important to recognise that. Awareness of one's personal human struggles can help a leader to engage in soul work required for growth. Blaming others especially confreres and members of one's congregation for all or most of the challenges the leader experiences actually brings no interior progress or personal development. Acknowledgment of personal weaknesses is better than denying them. That can be liberating and in fact, takes away whatever influence those weakness can have on the leader.

Struggle between the "Ideal self" and the "Actual self"

As religious and principally as "good" people, who most likely embraced Religious Life in order to live more actively the Gospel, the desire to live the ideals are usually present. Hence, the leader can experience struggles between the actual person that he or she is, and the ideal self to which he or she aspires.

Dilemma of Choices

There is also the ever present dilemma of choices between kindly acts and malevolence. It is also a fact that on occasion, it can be choosing between two "goods" that warrant discernment on the part of the leader. With the complexities of the human condition a person's capacity for making choices can be limited by various conditions; in that case, culpability can be null and void. The Church in her wisdom recognises this reality, hence states in her Catechism: "*Imputability* and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1735*). Such conditions mentioned above can sometimes limit the freedom of the leader in taking Christ-centred decisions and actions.

Inordinate Thirst for Power and Influence

This is another big problem with which a leader can be saddled. While in some communities today, it is almost impossible to get religious willing to accept to lead, in others, some religious compete and engage in ploys to be elected to a leadership position. Leaders can get over preoccupied with 'leaving a mark' in order to impress the members of the congregation, or to make a name for himself or herself. Too much expectation on oneself can be damaging. Already, people tend to expect a lot from their leaders, sometimes, too much. It is like double agony

when a leader adds that kind of pressure on self. There are dangers when these inner self-imposed pressures rule the decisions and actions of a leader. Such can lead to seeking self, hence pursuing projects and ambitions which neglects the cultivation of the inner life. The inner life is invisible to the eyes, therefore, the leader who puts excessive value on what can be seen and praised is unlikely to give much energy and attention to it.

External Sources

Growing Secularisation in Society and Hostility towards Religious

Stories of growing secularisation and hostility towards priests and religious in certain parts of the globe might give a sense of security to some in other parts of the world. No one is really immune to this trend. For example, lately in some African countries, many religious, priests and seminarians have been attacked and abducted. There also seems to be a trend with young people returning to African Traditional Religion, often out of anger and defiance of the Church authorities over perceived abuse of power and highhandedness. These happenings are worrying. Leaders need an honest reflection and appraisal of these realities, their own part in it, and what ways they can tackle this challenge.

Opposition from Members

Interference and unconstructive criticism of confreres and sisters, and sometimes active opposition to the leader is a reality. At times too, factions and cliques can grow in religious communities. Not only are factions formed, some actively undermine the work of the leadership. This usually comes from perpetually professed members who have an erroneous sense of indemnification and immunity. They believe that once they are finally professed or ordained “no one can send me out of this congregation”. Such attitudes constitute huge problems for leaders and can sap the energy that could be invested in other vital dimensions of the consecrated life.

For leaders, challenges will always be present. How one deals with them is crucial. Learning to handle challenges without being overrun by them is a grace to pray for. Some members can truly try the patience of their leaders; realising this fact can be helpful in not taking every opposition personally.

Attitude of Omnipotence and Compulsion to be of help

Leadership ministry in itself can be quite demanding. There is always a long string of expectations from sisters and confreres. The leader can feel a heavy weight of pressure as a result, yet the leader might be afraid or uncomfortable with showing vulnerability. The leader therefore thinks that he or she has to constantly look after others, but not themselves. This can result in “compulsive independence” that equally leads to “constant eagerness to help others while refusing any help they themselves might need (Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 24). The leader’s vulnerability

can be an encouragement to struggling brothers and sisters, knowing that we are all in the same boat and in need of both human assistance and divine mercy.

Dealing with Members' Exit from the Congregation

In recent times, there has been recorded a high number of consecrated men and women leaving or seeking dispensation from their vows. This has prompted the Holy See to call for reflection on our vocation and commitment. Whenever any member comes to the decision to leave the religious community, it is usually a challenging time for all. The particular individual in transition and the leadership are the active players in the process. When this is a harmonious and properly discerned process by the leaving religious, it helps to lessen the weight of such a major event for everyone concerned. Conversely, there can be animosity and tension when the decision comes from leadership. The leader bears the heavy load of being blamed for being responsible for the decision. This is one of the areas of great challenge for leaders, owing partly to the fact that in certain societies leaving religious life is still seen as a failure and something of which to be ashamed. Leaders of religious need to be well informed about the canonical steps to be taken in such matters. That can greatly ease the difficult process of settling the individual and the application for a dispensation, etc. Proper discernment of vocation and formation can help to minimise some of these difficult situations.

The Reality of the present Pandemic

Covid-19 has proven true to its name of pandemic. Everybody around the world has been impacted in one way or another by the corona virus. As countries and families face the challenge that this poses, so do religious congregations. It has taken a toll on leaders and religious communities. Some have lost a considerable number of members. These multiple deaths and funerals, especially during the first wave of the pandemic, and even now, have not been easy for anyone. This pandemic and its effects have left many leaders of congregations traumatized. It is not only about burying their dead, but they are also grappling with how best to keep faithful to their leadership ministry, negotiate sensitive issues and keep their members safe especially the most vulnerable and elderly among them. The question remains: What can be done to heal, process and share these stories of the effects of Covid-19 on everyone? Religious men and women need to heal first before being instruments of healing and reconciliation for others. Leaders have a great part to play in this.

References

Brown, B., *The Gifts of Imperfection – Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are – Your Guide to A Wholehearted Life*, Minnesota, Hazelden Publishing, 2010.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications-Africa, 1994.
- CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience – Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram, Instruction*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008.
- Edman, D., *Your Weaknesses are Your Strengths – Transformation of the Self through Analysis of Personal Weaknesses*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1994.
- Ezeani, C. C., *Interculturality in Religious Life, A Blessing in Different Colours*, Abuja, Paulines Publications Africa, 2019.
- John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications-Africa, 1996.
- Nwagwu, M. G., 'Practice of Discipline within Communities in African Context; Especially Mishandling of Funds', in *Consecrated Life and Canon Law*, UISG Bulletin, Number 162, 2017, 11 - 24.
- O'Donohue J., *Benedictus – A Book of Blessings*, London, Bantam Press, 2007.
- Palmer, P. J., *Leading from Within - Reflections on Spirituality and Leadership*, Indiana, Campus Ministry and Lily Endowment Inc., 1990.
- Palmer, P. J., *Let Your Life Speak – Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, San Francisco, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000.
- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel*, Apostolic Exhortation, London, Catholic Truth Society, 2013.
- Radcliff, T., 'Religious Life After 11th September: What Signs do we Offer?' in *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity - Acts of the Congress on Consecrated Life*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 2005.
- Steindl-Rast, D., *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer – An Approach to Life in Fullness*, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press, 1984.
- Ukwuije, B. (2013) "Faith in Africa in the Context of the New Evangelisation", in *SEDOS Bulletin*, Vol. 45, No. 9/10- September October, 211-221.
- Recommended Reading
- Ezeani, C. C., *Rooted in Christ- Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation*, Iperu, Nigeria, Ambassador Publications, Missionary Society of St Paul, 2007.
- Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020.



GLOBAL COMPACT ON EDUCATION: FINAL DECLARATIONS AND ACTION PLANS

Commission on Education UISG-USG

The Commission on Education of the two Unions of Superiors General (UISG-USG), has compiled the work done at the 2020 Seminar “Rebuilding the Global Compact on Education”, held on 12, 13 and 14 November, and led by **Miriam Subirana and Pep Buetas** on the basis of the Appreciative Inquiry.

The resulting document is the contribution of the declarations of aspirations and guidelines for action, organized after a work of synthesis.

In this issue of the Bulletin we offer some extracts from this document.

We hope that the launch of the **Global Compact on Education** will be an initiative that will encourage change in our way of educating, in our way of viewing people, of being present in the world we live in. May our dreams for a different future and a different school in a world we want to change, converge. Let us dream together in the construction of a more humane world for all!

Walking together

1. We walk together in the synodality that fascinates and challenges us. We are an orchestra, in which each of us plays his/her own instrument, nobody feels marginalized and, always looking at our Master, we all keep the same rhythm and time, playing the notes that we have been given by our score and caring for every human being that participates in this melody. Each of us does his/her own best, feeling responsible for the blossoming of his/her own skills, knowing that the contribution of each and every instrument is unique and crucial, if we want to achieve the goal of a harmonious melody. Even in our fragility, we all feel a sense of belonging, thus experiencing happiness, completeness, strength, and solidity, which all enable us to contrast the storms of time and to gift others with the beauty of this harmony.
2. Keep being synodal! As educators, we want to keep learning how to walk or, better said, swim (on the high seas!) together. Following the example of Jesus, walking on water, guided by the Spirit, and cared by our Merciful Father, we want to keep sailing, in this time of so many liquid tides; we newly head towards the other shore, where the Global Compact on Education is already being fallowed. We know that, if we want to go the distance, we need to keep swimming slowly; we are convinced that the only way to understand if we are really moving ahead, is to know if with and among us also the most marginalized, those that our society rejects, are moving ahead.

3. Walking together, we have been living our dream: renewing our society from the very flower of humanity, namely the child, thanks to fraternal groups that put at risk and transform what is old, making a new education commitment bloom. Crossing boundaries, we deeply feel the necessity of mutually giving and receiving. We make all people develop, educating them to life, caring for the future of our children and young people, training their skills, ethics, and spirit for an unknown future.
4. Coming generations can see the goodness of God through our personal assumption of responsibility. We want to show our collective understanding of what walking with others means. Through our transparency, others can be deeply and passionately motivated to undertake the responsibility of what each of us says and does. Nobody is left outside, and all are involved and committed.
5. We are happy of having had the possibility of gathering in many, different charisms; thusly, we adhere to the Church' communion, devoting the necessary time to the creation of a shared dialogue among the various pastoral agents. Through multicultural and intercultural covenants, we have been building the Kingdom, generously trying to always accomplish the common good.
6. With cheerfulness and hope, we have been building a Catholic school, which mirrors its essence, mission, and vision, and which is always committed to a high-quality education that evangelizes by educating and educates by evangelizing. In its heart, the educational community, which identifies with the school's charism, bears witness to Jesus' values through its shared mission. Our roots are also our networks that support and push us to move forward in the care of life.

Action plans

- *Rekindling the covenant between the school and families, congregations, churches, and society itself, by means of cooperative and brotherly networks.*
- *Working in synodality.*
- *Fostering inter-congregational covenants.*
- *Working together for a shared project.*
- *Uniting, so as to address the concrete needs of our reality in an innovative way.*
- *Drafting a clear declaration of our mission and vision (being fully aware of our commitments).*
- *Promoting new participatory methods, e.g. appreciative inquiries and other forms of social commitment, that support the launching and activation of the Global Compact on Education*
- *Promoting those human relationships to whose adjective we can add the*

prefix “inter” - e.g., interpersonal, intercommunity, interinstitutional and intercultural relationships -, in order to join forces and be mutually enriched .

- *Stimulating the creative capacity of the educational community, starting from what we are (Gospel, charisms).*
- *Imbuing the Institutional Educational Project with the ideas and inspirations of the Global Compact on Education.*
- *Creating common spaces, to share our dreams and strengths and walk together.*
- *Starting processes of analysis, listening and dialogue to help the assumption of responsibilities, enriching our personal knowledge and the interaction with others, by being empathetic and caring for others.*
- *Developing an international team that promotes and manages our common educational projects.*

In harmony with nature

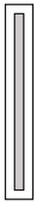
1. Our main objective is that of being able to peacefully interact with our surrounding environment, be it animals or plants, in order to live in peace and serenity. Our main objective is that of building bridges with the youngest generations, because there is only one Earth to welcome us all. Starting a relationship with others, we aim at fostering our sense of communication, as symbolized by the necessity of teaching children to love the singing of birds.
2. How beautiful is the world we live in! Our community is convinced of the importance of caring for and restoring our common home, where we are all loved. We deal with and integrate processes of integral ecology: we live in contact with Nature, we can bathe in every river, drink water from clear springs; we can eat every fruit, because our homes are always open; we are all brothers and sisters; neighbours help one another and cities are always pleasant , clean and with a temperate climate. God’s dream can come true!
3. We live in a space of shared silence, where we meet with others, with ourselves and with transcendence that enables us to profoundly perceive reality through self-awareness and emotional autoregulation, and to become sensitive people that build healthy relationships and are interconnected with our common home.

Action plans

- *Promoting contact with Nature, solidarity, contemplation, and silence.*
- *Starting education processes concerning human beings and the care for our common home, by promoting educational courses on inner life*

Global compact on education

- *Starting education/formation courses that enable participants to discover vulnerability and the richness of diversity, in the name of the dignity of every human and living being:*
 - a) *Fostering self-awareness and the sense of belonging to the Earth*
 - b) *Feeling our identity as part of a whole (universal fraternity)*
 - c) *Starting a process of conversion in our daily life , by means of experiences of encounter with Earth, Nature and others.*
- *Educating to the ability to feel admiration, to wonder, to contemplate the little things of our daily life and the Nature that surrounds us.*
- *Educating children to love the singing of birds.*
- *Drafting inclusive action plans that enable social inclusion and transformation, and that never neglect the care of our common home.*
- *Informing on and promoting the study of the encyclical letter Laudato Si'.*



From the Desk of the Executive Secretary

As we look to the start of 2022 here is a reminder of the various stages of the process for the UISG Assembly

- Part I:** March 14 (online) Exploring the topic “Embracing Vulnerability on the Synodal Journey.”
- Part II:** April 4 (online) What is emerging as we prepare for the May Assembly?
- Part III:** May 2-6 (in person/online)
ASSEMBLY AND AUDIENCE WITH POPE FRANCIS (May 5)
- Part IV:** July 11(online) Gathering the Fruits

The intention is to proceed with the Assembly in person even if the numbers are significantly lower than usual because of Covid -19 and the new Omicron variant. These are difficult times for all and especially for those parts of the world that do not have easy access to the vaccines.

During these final months of 2021, the various synodal Commissions – Spirituality, Theology, Methodology and Communications – have been very active. They have all been preparing resources for the Synod Website which can be accessed at www.synod.va. Here you will find several important sections including: Communications Toolkit, Tools for Facilitating the Synodal Consultation, Roadmap for the Diocesan Phase as well as the Preparatory Document, the Vademecum, the Logo and the Adsumus Prayer all available in various languages. Religious are encouraged to participate in the diocesan phase through their parishes and other groups. In addition the Presidents of the UISG and USG have launched a simple reflection process for Congregational Leaders who may choose whom they wish to involve in the process. A team of theologians – Gemma Simmonds CJ, José Christo Rey Garcia Paredes CMF, Orlando Torres SJ and Sr. Maria Cimperman RSCJ – will collect the responses and prepare the final summary on behalf of the two unions. It is hoped that this summary will be helpful for ongoing reflection.

Many webinars have been offered during this period on aspects of *Canon Law, Sowing Hope for the Planet – Biodiversity, Climate Change and Mining and the necessity to engage in Advocacy*. The JPIC Office of the USG-UISG offered a training programme for JPIC promoters titled: *Engaging Laudato Si and Justice in the World – Continuing the Narration*. Over 400 participants from all continents

attended the five-day workshop, which was held in English, Spanish, and French. The major themes treated were the global framework of Justice and Peace, JPIC foundations on Catholic Social Teaching (CST), JPIC spirituality, JPIC sacred action, exposition on *Laudato Si* & Justice in the World, the pastoral cycle, Religious/Apostolic Societies at the UN, SDGs and *Laudato Si* goals, Synodality in the Church, DPIHD structure, and encounter and dialogue to build a better world. Monthly updates about the work of the USG-UISG JPIC Commission and Office and a multitude of JPIC resources can be sourced from the JPIC website <https://jpicroma.org/>. Please alert your JPIC promoters.

The launch of the Talitha Kum's *Call to Action* in November 25, 2021 was a very significant event for UISG. This is the first time that the UISG Executive Board has endorsed such a comprehensive plan for action and advocacy in a significant area of ministry. The Action Plan can be found on the Talitha Kum website in various languages - <https://www.talithakum.info/en/call-to-action/>. The event was attended by Cardinal Parolin, several Ambassadors to the Holy See, and officials from different international and inter-governmental organizations with the support of the Global Solidarity Fund (GSF).

The following presenters offered important interventions and reflections:

- Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State
- Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking
- Dr. Azza Karam of Religions for Peace International
- Ambassador Pietro Sebastiani, Italy's Ambassador to the Holy See
- Laurence Hart of the International Organization on Migration (IOM)
- Sr. Angela Reed, Head of Mercy International
- Sisters Jolanta Kafka and Patricia Murray of UISG

The members of the Talitha Kum's international committee presented the *Call to Action*. Sr. Abby Avellino, Sr. Carmen Ugarte Garcia, Sr. Gabriella Bottani, Sr. Maria Luisi Puglisi and Sr. Yvonne Bambara, also shared their experiences in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, where economic crises, wars and migration fuel exploitation of the most vulnerable, especially women and girls. Other notable participants included, Dr. Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication; Francesca di Giovanni, Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs of the Vatican Secretariat of State; the Ambassadors and delegates of 10 Embassies to the Holy See (Australia, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, UK); and representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and Maria Lia Zervino, the President of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO).

The expression *Talitha Kum* defines the identity and mission of the global umbrella network that gathers more than 3,000 Catholic sisters, allies and friends. Formally established in 2009 as an international initiative against human trafficking

and exploitation, Talitha Kum is organized in 60 local networks across nearly 90 countries, actively supporting victims, survivors and people at risk. While each Talitha Kum network retains its unique identity and operates within its own country or region, the Coordination Committee at the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) supports capacity development and training of networks and members, and facilitates the sharing of information, resources and experiences. We invite sisters worldwide to identify their local network and to collaborate together to make the Talitha Kum Action Plan known and lived.

News

XXII UISG Plenary Assembly 2022

The UISG Plenary Assembly is one of the most notable events in the life of the Union, and it is reserved exclusively for its members, the Superiors General of Religious Congregations of Apostolic Life.

For the first time, we have designed an ASSEMBLY PROCESS for 2022 entitled ***EMBRACING VULNERABILITY ON THE SYNODAL JOURNEY***, which involves three phases that are reserved for Superior Generals:

Phase One: 2 online meetings on **14 March and 4 April 2022**

Phase Two: (online and presential)

Meeting in ROME at the Ergife Palace Hotel: **2-6 May 2022**

Final Phase: Online meeting on **11 July 2022**

Sr Jolanta Kafka, UISG President, thus explains the theme chosen for the first UISG assembly process:

EMBRACING: Tenderness and acceptance of our reality and of the world as it is; closeness to the wounds of humanity.

VULNERABILITY: *as religious life we share our vulnerability that makes us as fragile as our sisters and brothers.*

JOURNEY: *all of us are involved, each with her possibilities and her word.*

SYNODAL: *a style and a horizon that becomes a vision, a pedagogy that makes*

us an ecclesial community, even with the persons who are most distant.

We ask all the sisters to accompany this process with their prayers.

Info: www.uisg.org

Laudato Si' Platform

Caring for our brothers and sisters means caring for the home we share. This responsibility is “essential to a life of virtue” (LS 217).

The Laudato Si' Action Platform of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development is a space where institutions, communities, and families can learn and grow together as we journey toward full sustainability in the holistic spirit of integral ecology.

The platform proposes initiatives and materials for 7 years of progression on the following topics: *Response to the cry of the earth; Response to the cry of the poor; Ecological economics; Adoption of sustainable lifestyles; Ecological education; Ecological spirituality; and Community engagement and participatory action.*

For information: <https://piattaformadiiniziatiavelaudatosi.org> or you can contact Sr. Sheila Kinsey, the coordinator of the Campaign Sowing Hope for the Planet: info@sowinghopefortheplanet.org

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

The synodal path was officially opened in October 2021 with the start of the first phase: the diocesan phase.

The UISG is also engaged in this process. In particular, it will promote, together with the World Network of Prayer of the Pope, an experience of world prayer that will accompany the entire path of the Synod, entitled “The Church on the Move. Pray for a Synodal Church,” which was launched on 13 October 2021 with the opening of the website prayforthesynod.va, where it will be possible to publish prayers in the form of texts, images, and poems.

“To ‘walk together’ while listening to the Holy Spirit, we need to pray. There is no synodal journey without personal and community prayer. Prayer disposes our hearts to listen to others and helps us discern the action of the Holy Spirit in the world.” The prayer site for the Synod opens with these words.

The preparatory document and the handbook can be downloaded from the official website of the 2023 Synod: www.synod.va

General Chapters in 2022

Will your General Chapter be held in 2022? Please send us your information so we can share it with our members and accompany you with prayer.

We ask you to use this link to send us your information, which will only be accepted through this channel: <https://bit.ly/3kT7PYT>

UISG Webinar 2020-2021

Did you miss a webinar? Were you unable to attend? Would you like to organize a formation meeting with your community on religious life, interculturality, integral ecology?

At this link you can find thematic playlists from which to choose the webinar that interests you: www.youtube.com/c/UISGRome/playlists

STAFF UISG

<i>SECRETARIAT</i>	Sr. Patricia Murray, ibvm <i>segretaria.esecutiva@uisg.org</i> <i>Executive Secretary</i> 0668.400.236
	Rosalia Armillotta <i>ufficio.segreteria@uisg.org</i> <i>Assistant to the Executive Secretary</i> 0668.400.238
<i>FINANCES</i>	Aileen Montojo <i>economato@uisg.org</i> <i>Financial Administrator</i> 0668.400.212
	Sr. Sunitha Lusciuous, zsc <i>Assistant Financial Administrator</i>
	Patrizia Balzerani <i>assistente.economato@uisg.org</i> <i>Membership Secretary</i> 0668.400.249
<i>COMMUNICATION</i>	Patrizia Morgante <i>comunicazione@uisg.org</i> <i>Communication Officer</i> 0668.400.234
	Sr. Thérèse Raad, sdc <i>assistente.comunicazione@uisg.org</i> <i>Communication Office (Volunteer)</i> 0668.400.233
	Antonietta Rauti <i>bollettino@uisg.org</i> <i>Coordinator UISG Bulletin</i> 0668.400.230
<i>SERVICES</i>	Bianca Pandolfi <i>info@uisg.org</i> <i>UISG Information Office</i>
	Svetlana Antonova <i>assis.tec@uisg.org</i> <i>Technical Assistant General Services</i> 0668.400.250
	Riccardo Desai <i>tecnico@uisg.org</i> <i>Technical Assistant for computers and online technology</i> 0668.400.213
<i>PROJECTS</i>	Sr. Florence de la Villeon, rscj <i>rete.migranti@uisg.org</i> <i>International Coordinator Migrants Project</i> 0668.400.231
	Sr. Gabriella Bottani, smc <i>coordinator@talithakum.info</i> <i>Coordinator Talitha Kum</i> 0668.400.235
	Sr. Mayra Cuellar, mb <i>Talitha Kum Database</i>
	Sr. Mary Niluka Perera, sgs <i>ccc@uisg.org</i> <i>Catholic Care for Children International</i> 0668.400.225
	Claudia Giampietro <i>safeguarding@uisg.org</i> <i>Office for Care and Protection</i> 0668.400.225
	Sr. M. Cynthia Reyes, sra <i>formators.programme@uisg.org</i> <i>UISG Formators Programme</i> 0668.400.227
	Paula Jordão <i>formation@uisg.org</i> <i>Formation Coordinator</i> 0668.400.245
	Giulia Oliveri <i>gm@uisg.org</i> <i>Grant Manager</i> 0668.400.229
Canon Law Council <i>canoniste@uisg.org</i> 0668.400.223	