Columns
Ministry
Environment



Missionary Sisters of St. Columban in the Philippines organized a beach cleanup as part of a project to educate people about caring for the environment. (Courtesy of Cristita de Leon)



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Pope Francis has been urgently calling us to care for our common home through *Laudato Si'*. The whole global community has found countless ways to respond to this call.

A small group of our sisters has been taking some first steps in animating others to engage and commit themselves to care for our Mother Earth, especially during this time of climate emergency. We have also made a video illustrating our efforts to care for the earth.

One thing we did was to organize a feeding program with the collaboration of our Columban Sisters' Lay Associates. Before the pandemic, we had established some livelihood programs to help several families living in difficult situations.

We offered them activities such as faith sharing, and seminars on organic gardening and caring for our environment, with the aim of raising their awareness about the environmental problems existing around us.

There are three specific goals that we tried to achieve with the group of mothers we work with. From their involvement in organic gardening and in preparing food for the children, we hope that their experiences will lead them to the realization that everything we receive and come in contact with are gifts from our Creator; we are sustained through grace by the same Creator. We share one and the same "heartbeat" with the whole of God's creation.



Missionary Sisters of St. Columban in the Philippines work with a group of mothers who practice organic gardening. Laudato Si' reminds us that this care for the earth sows seeds for future generations. (Courtesy of Cristita de Leon)

We hope that from their experiences they will understand in a deeper way how we are all interconnected — that we share one gift of life (existence) from God our Creator — and hope that this deepens, nourishes and shapes their faith/prayer life.

Finally, after seeing and understanding all this, we hope that that they will cultivate love and respect for all forms of life — every creature — around them. We hope that they will defend, restore, protect and care for God's creation; and that they will be impelled to take concrete actions in caring for our common home.

In what way could we offer these experiences to the group of mothers?

We introduced them to practicing mindfulness as they engage in prayer, work and in partaking of food/meals, and we guided them in reflecting on our origins and on all the material things we find around us.

Later they shared some of their realizations with us:

- Every creature/thing is precious and has a special place on our planet.
- There were times in their lives when they neglected the gifts God has given us through the natural world, and how they have been living their lives lacking in awareness about the interdependency among all forms of life/nonlife forms that are present on our planet.
- They don't always take care of our environment. That starts with the way they manage garbage, which has been affecting the health of the community living in the area.
- Every activity we engage in, we give time for reflections as a way of looking deeper in our experiences.

For example, when we were cleaning up the beach, we offered these questions:

- How did you feel while gathering the garbage along the beach?
- What motivated you/inspire you to join the group?
- How will you describe your experience?
- Would you invite your family members or friends to join you for the next cleanup drive?

What we shared here were our simple, concrete and doable actions or involvement in this particular mission area of ours. We hoped that this would be our "mustard seed" that goes through stages of growing and spreading. The nurturing and the watering are the tasks shared by many hands. We know that cannot do it alone; we need each other for this ongoing collaborative effort.

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It calls me and all of us to live a coherent lifestyle: a total dependence on the providence of God our Creator — that all is grace. I have to love, honor, revere, respect and protect all these gifts, and live with them in ways that are in accord with

God's dream and design for the community of life in our common home.

Embracing the challenge of integral ecology opens up for me countless possible ways of responding to the call of Pope Francis, whether I find myself among the fishing and farming communities or teaching in the classroom. The lived reality of people in a certain place is in itself the place through which God’s voice is heard, calling us to act.

Our Earth and humanity have been weeping so bitterly. I ask myself these questions each day: How can I bring healing to these wounded people? In what way could I help restore the damages done to our Mother Earth right here in the place where I am now? How could I animate more people to join me in this advocacy?