

Parishes Caring for Creation by Fran Brady

More than 100 parishes were represented at the Laudato Si Conference on the theme of *Parishes Caring for Creation* at Crowne Plaza Hotel Blanchardstown on 24rd November 2023. Four members of Eco-Congregation Ireland attended and had a presence in the Marketplace. The Brigidine Sisters from Solas Bhríde led the opening reflection. They spoke about the importance of harmony and right relationship with the blossoming universe. Spiritual practice holds one rooted and connected and enables effective self-regulation. Earth, like a Sacrament, should be treated with awe and reverence.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell, the first speaker, remarked that action for Climate Change has been a slow process since Paris 2015. COP 28, the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, will start on 30th November 2023. Will the delegates be able to take into consideration the needs of our children and grandchildren? We're living in a collapsing world. Politicians must act for the Common Good. Lack of passion in people means 'no pressure' on politicians. Idealism is needed. The Church has a role to play in dialogue. We need to be aware of the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. Raising our GDP wreaks havoc on our poorer brothers and sisters. No change will come about through Fear. Frightening figures don't lead to reform. It's a human and social problem. We need to get people back into nature. We need a humbler and simpler way of life. Discover God in all things. Encounter the beauty of all. Feel gratitude for the diversity of species.

John Sweeney Emeritus Professor of Geography, NUI Maynooth, reminded us that 2023 was a year of extreme events. September was the warmest month on records, July 6th the warmest day, 2003 the warmest year. Simultaneous heat events occurred in many areas, such as Canada, Hawaii, Northern Greece and Italy. There was a global increase in extreme rainfall and droughts.

A small shift in temperature makes a big difference. Ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity are being lost for ever. Ice caps and glaciers are melting. Coral reefs are dying. We need to change from a human-centred point of view and be mindful of the intrinsic value of all biodiversity.

On the 18th August 2019 Icelanders said farewell to Okjokull glacier which became extinct because of climate change. A plaque at the site of the former glacier reads "In the next 200 years, all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done."

There is very little greenhouse gas pollution in developing countries. Yet they are most vulnerable. Those dependent on rain are vulnerable. Those who live near sea level are vulnerable. Bangladesh, a very vulnerable country, has a population of 160 million. What would happen to Environmentally Displaced People in Bangladesh?

Lorna Gold, author and climate activist, said Trocaire is like a firebrigade fighting disasters. Imagine the pain of our brothers and sisters who live in poverty. Lorna grew up in the shadow of an oil refinery. It is now closing. Lorna is pleased. Her family are worried about the loss of jobs and the life of the town.

We need something to lift up our eyes in times of darkness and sorrow. Laudato Si is like a lens of faith, hope and love. Everything is connected in the life of parishes where a whole approach to Creation is taken including how the Liturgy is celebrated. Pope Francis, who will attend COP 28, has said that everything we do matters. We need ecological and social conversion. There needs to be political and economic change. Lorna spoke of our circles of concern, influence and control. What can we do as citizens, consumers, pension recipients, members of organisations and through our many other connections.

Our last speaker was Sr Nellie McLaughlin RSM, who works in cosmology, ecology, sustainable living and creation spirituality, asked Is caring for Creation an issue or a way of life.

Nellie spoke about Earth Overshoot Day which marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. In 2023, it fell on 2 August.

In Ireland Earth Overshoot Date was on 21st April, the date when the ecological resources and services for the year would be used up if everyone in the world lived like Ireland. Around 140 countries reach Earth Overshoot Date at some date before the end of December. Several countries in Africa as well as the subcontinent of India and a few other countries do not reach Earth Overshoot. They live within the biocapacity of the earth.

Humanity is often perceived as above All. We should be mindful of the Oneness of All Live in an evolving and expanding universe. Love unfolds a universe of Subjects, each sacred, beloved, unique, precious, different but not separate.