



## Living as a *Laudato-Si'* Congregation?

By Maria-Theresia Knippschild, Bavarian Province/Districts of Austria-Italy and of Czechoslovakia

Our commitment to pursue the *Laudato Si'* goals as a Congregation says: *In fidelity to our charism and mission... we commit ourselves to educate for the dignity of life and the integrity of creation.*

“Is this really possible, given our increasing age? Can we really commit ourselves to caring for our common home?” Many sisters asked themselves these questions and thought about bigger actions. But often, it is precisely the so-called small things that are done consistently that are extremely important and supportive of the integrity of creation.



The sisters in *our six retirement homes* truly feel like members of our international prayer community for justice, peace, and integrity of creation. During visits, sisters promise regular, daily prayer for the needs of the province and the world. In this way, they also give credible witness and are examples to numerous employees. It is very important for the sisters and staff in *our educational institutions* to educate those entrusted to them to be mindful of the entirety of creation. In addition to practicing good interaction with each other, students learn about care for creation. An example is the “eco-kids” experience. Children learn what it means to live a day without electricity: having breakfast by candlelight, not having a warm lunch, and not being able to use a computer or phone.

In another institution, students worked for the benefit of their fellow human beings by assembling food packages for those in need in Regensburg or collecting plastic caps for polio vaccinations. In *all our communities*, we buy consciously and sustainably in terms of clothing, food, and detergents and make sure that the food comes from the region or the country, is seasonal, and preferably without plastic packaging. In a conversation with the leaders of our communities, it became clear how important it is to be aware of these “little things” and to see that the commitment to the integrity of creation is inseparable from our life as SSNDs.

## School Sisters of the Notre Dame Participation at the UN

By Sister Beatriz Martínez-García, SSND, UN-NGO Representative.

As a non-governmental organization at the UN, we focus on advocating for the rights of girls, women, and those living in poverty. We aim to bring about systematic changes in society.

I am excited to share with you the participation of sisters, associates, colleagues, and SSND institutions in UN conferences, as well as the advocacy work organized by NGOs. Collaboration for the well-being of people and the planet is inspiring.

On January 31, a group of 36 enthusiastic students from the Academy of Holy Angels in New Jersey, USA, visited the United Nations. Joan Connelly and Jennifer Cucchisi led the group with great excitement. During the presentation at the Visitor Café area, I explained the role of NGOs at the UN. This included the advocacy work of the SSNDs in collaboration with other NGOs and the SSND *Shalom*. International Network. The students were receptive and asked interesting questions. After the presentation, the group took the UN-guided tour.



On February 9, the [NGO Committee on Social Development](#) hosted the Civil Society Forum 2024. Sr. Karina Ubillús Agurto (South Sudan) participated in the event via live stream. Before the Forum, I met with representatives from the governments of Ghana, Japan, Peru, Poland, and Portugal, along with other colleagues. We discussed the [Committee's Four Advocacy Priorities](#), which are highlighted in the Civil Society Declaration 2024, endorsed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

The [Commission on the Status of Women](#) held its sixty-eighth session from March 11 to 22. The SSND Delegation comprised of students and staff from Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, WI and the Academy of the Holy Angels in New Jersey, USA. To prepare for the Commission, all delegates participated in an online orientation meeting.



Another exciting event was the visit to the United Nations by 40 students and five staff members from Notre Dame High School in Kyoto, Japan, with whom I met and gave a presentation on “Artisans of Peace” on March 8.

## JOURNEYING IN DIGNITY Listen, Dream, Act

*By Novice Marcellar Chepkemoi, Province of Africa*

We, the Novitiate and some sisters from the Generalate communities, were blessed by God to attend an interfaith prayer vigil, joining the church in praying for greater awareness of and work against human trafficking. Pope Francis says, “I encourage you to care for dignity, yours and that of every person you meet.” This is so inspiring because true dignity begins with oneself, starting from who we are and what we do by our very being and extending who we are to others.



The prayer was spirit-filled, with times of silence and meaningful intercessions, which were universal and very touching as they connected to five elements of nature. Sharing our concerns for all of creation, we become good shepherds to one another. This calls for prayer that we all strive to care for the earth, which is our home. If we truly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand how the elements of nature (water, fire, air, wind, and soil) are related to human trafficking, we will be able to know its root causes and why human dignity is affected.

It was reiterated in prayer that we need to pray for the grace to listen, dream, and act. We SSNDs raise our voices “to eliminate the root causes of injustice,” as stated in *You Are Sent (YAS)* Constitution 17: *We strive to be in solidarity with those who are suffering. We pray to grow in the responsibility of caring for one another and for our mother earth.*

Many people are wounded through human trafficking caused by war, conflicts, climate crises, and politics. We prayed for the graces of healing, protection, and freedom for all who are trafficked. It was also touching that many youth from different parts of the world came to pray, and spread awareness against human trafficking. This is really the hope for the future: seeing our youth coming out of their comfort zone and going beyond. This is so inspiring, and we need to pray more and more so that the youth may become more open to this call and respond. As the patron saint of this cause, St. Bakhita, said: *“The Lord has loved me so much. We must love everyone.”* In the face of inhuman trials, she only saw the face of Christ.

## Mindful of Our Impact on People and Planet

*By Tim Dewane, Shalom-JPIC, Central Pacific Province*

**“Education in the spirit of Blessed Theresa, focused on human development and environmental sustainability, is critical for the transformation of our world.”** (*Acts of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*)

In recognition of January being Human Trafficking Awareness Month and in support of our SSND *Laudato Si’* Commitment, sisters, associates, and friends took time to consider *in a heightened way* the impact our choices have on people and the planet. Our journey began with a special webinar – [Mindful of Our Impact on People and Planet](#) – in which we used testimonials, reflection, and dialogue to explore how our food and consumption choices can contribute to a positive ripple effect for society or exacerbate the challenges faced by people and planet.

We followed up that experience with weekly reflections focusing on [Labor Trafficking and Child Labor](#); [The True Cost of Low Prices](#); [Fair Trade and Ethically Sourced](#); The [Five Rs](#) of waste reduction, and [Shifting Culture and Consciousness](#).



We concluded our initiative with a [video reflection](#) in celebration of the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita and in recognition of the International Day for Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking (February 8). This initiative helped us more clearly recognize that mindfully considered, every food and consumption choice we make becomes an opportunity to live out our values and to leave a positive imprint on Earth and its diverse communities. And that “every little bit helps” (*Laudate Deum* 70) because even the small things we do can help shift culture



and consciousness – which is fundamental for the transformation of self and society.

## Justice Coalition of Religious: A Model of Collaboration

By Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, SSND UN-NGO Representative



The [Justice Coalition of Religious](#) (JCoR) is a group of 22 non-governmental organizations that are accredited to collectively represent over 200 congregations of Roman Catholic women and men Religious at the UN in New York. JCoR membership work united to enhance collaboration among our members – at UN Headquarters and around the world – our common mission: to improve quality of life for people living in poverty and to enhance our stewardship of the natural environment.

On January 15, *Shalom* contacts from Honduras, Peru, and South Sudan participated in the first online meeting of the [2024 Programme for 'Digital Delegate' of Religious NGOs to the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development](#). They are getting ready to virtually attend this Forum in July.

The [Global Community Hour](#) (GCH) is a monthly global online gathering for Catholics available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Participants discover and exchange emerging regional justice concerns while staying informed about the advocacy of JCoR's family of congregations at the United Nations. The February GCH was focused on the SDG 2: *End hunger*. Our NGO led the prayer calling out that our hope and commitment is to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. Sisters Rosa Maria Trochez and Christine Garcia have been part of the program several times.

JCoR members submitted a written statement to the Commission on the Status of Women, which was a great opportunity to make their voices heard! To read the statement, please click on the link provided [Welcome - JCoR](#). Please explore the JCoR website to find resources that promote collaboration and strengthen members' capacity to address the root causes of unsustainable development.

## Please save the date to watch the livestream on UNWebTV



The twenty-third session of the [UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#) will be April 15-26. Official meetings will be livestreamed.

The theme is “Enhancing Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination in the context of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#): emphasizing the voices of Indigenous youth.”

---

*Shalom*/UN-NGO Newsletter is a publication of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.  
via della Stazione Aurelia 95, 00165 Roma · tel. +39.06.6652.01 fax: +39.06.6652.0234.