



Manifesto by the Young People participating in the 4th International Conference on Care for Creation held on the eve of WYD 2023

INTRODUCTION

We young Catholics came together in Lisbon for the International Conference on Care for Creation. The topic for discussion was *Young people's commitment to Integral Ecology. Lifestyles for a New Humanity*. It took place on the eve of the 37th World Youth Day. We are grateful to Pope Francis for putting integral ecology high on the agenda, and we thank the conference organizers, John Paul II Youth Foundation and its partners, for this opportunity to discuss such a pressing issue that is very close to our hearts.

Pope Francis asks us to listen to “those heartbeats: our own and those of our mothers and grandmothers, the heartbeat of creation and the heartbeat of God”. Today they do not beat in harmony for justice and peace, nor do they follow the rhythm of creation. There are so many armed conflicts of varying intensity happening in a number of countries. They claim lives, cause resentment and destruction, and leave behind people and communities that have to be rebuilt. Despite grand international proclamations, millions of people do not yet have access to the minimum conditions for a dignified life. They lack food, water, shelter, education and healthcare. So many more people continue to be enslaved, exploited and underpaid for informal and precarious work that robs them of all dignity and keeps them under the yoke of poverty. Likewise, many young people do not feel represented by their political leaders, even if they would like to participate. With unemployment so rife, they find themselves postponing and even giving up their plans to start a family. We have before our eyes the harrowing images of thousands of men, women, children and even babies, who try to escape from misery, war and oppression, and who have to rely on makeshift boats where they are harassed by unscrupulous boatmen. The grim end of some of these so-called voyages of hope is slowly turning seas and deserts into open graveyards for the many people who have died and are left unburied. Pollution of all kinds threatens air, soil, water, fauna, flora, and people too, with very serious consequences for the ecosystem. Climate change causes devastating heatwaves, floods, storms, fires and loss of biodiversity, forcing many populations to abandon their homes. Some have no qualms about dumping their polluting waste in other countries, or exploiting the soil there and the riches of the subsoil for their own benefit, regardless of the impact on local populations. Likewise, despite the great achievements of the digital world and technology, our humanity is slowly polluted: it is becoming increasingly difficult to create and cultivate healthy and lasting relationships; loneliness, addictions and



other mental health issues are on the rise. We are also seriously worried about big companies using their superpower to control our data and to influence us according to their interests. All too often, the ethos of technological advances and scientific research seems to be aimed at anything except improving people's living conditions and the health of our common home.

1. THEME OF THE CONFERENCE

In order to address this very complex crisis, Pope Francis suggests that integral ecology should be our blueprint for study and action because everything is connected. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* says that St Francis of Assisi could be our model as he “lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself” (LS 10). These relationships are to be protected and nurtured. Integral ecology is a challenging concept not yet fully grasped outside and inside the Church. It goes beyond environmentalism in the narrow sense and advocates taking a wide-angle view of the complex issues of our times. It ties together environmental ecology, social ecology, economic ecology, cultural ecology, sound institutions, quality of life, the ecology of everyday life with its practices and relationships, and finally human ecology which, among other things, gives importance to our understanding the significance of the human body. Integral ecology is about helping people to live lives full of meaning and creating the conditions for each person's integral human development and journey towards holiness. To this end, we must convert our lifestyles so that we can have an impact on both the symptoms and the roots of the problem. We must attune our practices, choices and behavior to the heartbeat of creation and to that of all brothers and sisters; in this way we are tuning ourselves to the very heartbeat of God. Conversion like this opens us up to a new humanity: a united human family that share a common origin, a common destiny and a common home. As we examine our lifestyles, we aim to live in harmony with all of Creation and to contribute to bringing about a new humanity in which we truly feel we are all brothers and sisters.

2. WORKING GROUPS

Our working groups examined five areas. We listened to each other and we tried to re-examine our lifestyles in those areas which were: education and family life, natural resources, politics, economics and technology. We focused on both practical actions and general principles, being determined to face reality and complexity while getting rid of ideologies.



We considered the important role of the family and education in shaping lifestyles. We realized that what people learn at home and school has a profound effect on society as a whole. We look forward to forging strong relationships in order to build bonds and communities between people from different backgrounds and cultures. World Youth Days are an excellent opportunity to practice this universal friendship.

We saw how lifestyles can make a difference when they are informed by fairness, justice, logic of gift and gratuity, solidarity, friendship, empathy, sobriety and sustainability in the use of available natural resources. A fundamental first step is to know what we care for. Therefore, we underscore the need for contemplation and spiritual meditation to feel closer to the entire creation which the Loving God entrusted to us. We admire the communities that have a strong connection to the whole of creation. We are not disconnected from the whole of creation: we are part of it and earthly goods and ecosystems are valuable. We need to manage them sustainably and use only what we really need.

We reflected on how important it is for good political action to be based on solid principles so that all can live in harmony: the common good, caring for the most vulnerable, ensuring work for all, long-term political thinking enabling all the people to express their ideas and needs. Too often, homogenized policies and solutions have been implemented and taught, but they prove ineffective because they did not consider the local realities.

We looked at how lifestyles, production and consumption affect each other. We discussed current trends, and the kind of impact we can have as players in the economy by making different and more demanding choices. We live in a very unequal and polarized world: some polluting consumption patterns are strongly connected to poverty; therefore, the two issues have to be addressed together. We also agreed on the sustainability of having kids since the main causes of unsustainability relate to selfish and unsustainable lifestyles of a few ones.

Finally, we talked about how technology, if used with prudence and hope, can be at the service of integral ecology, of encounter and inclusion including people with disabilities, and of caring for our common home. Therefore, nobody willing to benefit from such innovations should be denied access. One of our biggest concerns though is the safety of everyone, especially children. We also stressed the importance of a good balance between the digital and the real world.



3. COMMITMENTS

In view of these pressing challenges, we, the young participants at this conference, commit ourselves to the following:

To renew our personal ecological conversion and make room for the Holy Spirit to enlighten our reflection, discern, and inspire the steps to be taken. We are certain that we are loved and that this life and world are a gift to be taken care of. Through prayer we can maintain a meaningful and life-giving connection to God in order to purify our lifestyles.

To act with a sense of urgency like Mary. We also want to stand up with determination, to start new processes without procrastinating, and to avoid superficial and hasty behavior.

To be responsible in our consumption. We want to be moderate in the way we consume while being mindful about what we really need, the well-being of others and the sustainability of our common home: we prefer sharing and reusing goods. This includes our transport, our purchases, our leisure activities, and the way we eventually invest our money.

To proclaim the good news to everyone about the care of creation. We want to be a missionary and joyful outgoing Church and to be heralds of good news about our care for creation. We want to popularize best practices and make them viral so that they reach every young person.

To collaborate and establish far-reaching synergy with all people of goodwill who share our concern to take care of our common home together. This encompasses the various forms of political engagement. We want to make sure that the voice of everyone is heard and the global level collaborates more efficiently with the local one.

To inform and educate ourselves. We want to remain vigilant and to have curiosity and empathy to learn about the suffering, threats, joys, opportunities and hopes that affect our common home. We want to acquire knowledge that can help stem the ecological crisis. We want to overcome biases against other cultures or against people living in other continents, and instead learn from them.

To choose carefully which technologies should be adopted. We want to use and promote as much as possible those technologies that truly serve human beings and help to improve the health of our Mother Earth. And we want to do it in a human and ethical way in order to live in a christian way while we are in the digital continent.



4. APPEALS

The planetary dimensions of the ecological crisis are such that they require the contribution of everyone in the search for effective and lasting solutions. Therefore, we appeal:

To all the young people of the world. Let us join forces to reverse the trend; let us work together for the common good with the enthusiasm that characterizes us: “If we are what we should be, we will set fire to the whole world” (cf. Catherine of Siena, *Let.* 368).

To the Catholic Church to listen and accept what the Holy Spirit is telling us about safeguarding creation. There are many pastors and faithful who are not aware of *Laudato Si'* and who have not even heard of the efforts being made around the world to protect creation. We ask pastors and all who may be in positions of responsibility in our Church to set a good example of ecological conversion and to accompany young people's initiatives in this field. Catholic Social Teaching must constantly be shared as an important way to promote the necessary change of paradigm towards integral ecology.

To all Christian Churches and all religious denominations. We ask you to promote universal fellowship and a culture of encounter, benevolence and sustainable and inclusive lifestyles.

To the families of the world. Be ecosystems of love, giving, patience, responsibility and transmission of Gospel values and of how to live together. Create spaces of sharing and discernment for the care of our common home. Get familiar with green spaces and animals.

To the world of economics, production and business. We call for more transparency on finance and trading, and for a ban on commercial strategies that generate waste and all sorts of harmful addictions. Let your marketing promote sustainable lifestyles and let profit not be your only compass. Let the study of the environmental and social impact of your economic activities be one of the yardsticks for measuring the excellence of every economic enterprise. Let every workplace you create aim to ennoble human beings and be compatible with family life.

To rulers and politicians. We call for forward-looking policies for the protection of our common home that put the human person at the centre and give everyone an equal opportunity to grow and contribute to the development of their community, while fighting poverty, homelessness, and discrimination. We ask that major challenges threatening the life and households of millions of people are without



further delay seriously taken care of, for example: We implore you to put down your weapons and end all war, and to address the foreseeable consequences of the disruptive sea-level rise. Effective and binding mechanisms to care for biodiversity, with the involvement of local communities, are necessary. The sound management of waste and the phasing out of fossil fuels and dangerous chemicals have also to be priorities everywhere.

To the world of education. We ask all educational institutions to be concerned about growth ‘towards more meaning’ and towards ‘living in a good way’. We ask Catholic universities in particular to include concepts from the Church's social doctrine and specifically integral ecology in all their curricula. ‘Eco-anxiety’ should be avoided, rather, the knowledge and love for creation should be encouraged.

To the world of communication. We ask that attention be drawn to the ecological issue and problems of social injustice. We ask that attention also be given to whatever is beautiful, encouraging and constructive. Please do not be instigators of hatred and unbridled consumerism. Contribute to highlight the spiritual dimension of the crisis.

To the world of scientific research and technology. We ask you to invest in innovations that can minimise the environmental impact of human activity, and in those that can restore ecosystems and biodiversity where they have been particularly damaged. We ask for better indicators to measure performance and the ‘good’ that is achieved by a policy or a company; we also need more accurate indicators to measure poverty and integral human development. We ask that tech development be rooted on a sound ethical approach. Let your science be at the service of humanity.



FINAL PRAYER

Dear God,
You who create and sustain all things,
Increase our capacity to marvel at the work of your hands;
Enable us to be messengers and witnesses of the good news about caring for creation;
May your grace sustain our commitment to convert to a new way of life;
May your hand sustain us when our perseverance falters;
Teach us sobriety, simplicity, harmony and respect for every creature;
Sharpen our ears and we shall hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth;
Open our eyes and we will know how to recognise your face in that of every brother and sister;
Open our lips and we will sing your glory, O God of Creation.
Give us a new heart to love you and to love every one of your creatures;
Support families with your Spirit so that they may be sources of humanity and goodness;
Enlighten educators, politicians, business people and men and women of science so that they may all contribute with joy to the advent of a new humanity in which we all consider ourselves to be brothers and sisters.
Where structures of sin cause injury to humanity and our common home,
Awaken, O God, structures of grace and fellowship to heal and restore peace.
You are our hope, O God, and by following You, we shall not sink into anxiety and resignation.
Laudato si'!