



24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

## *Shalom/UN-NGO* Report, Part 2

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“Our charism continues to develop in the living community, which  
Enriched by the past,  
Enables the congregation to unfold in the present and  
Be challenged by the future.” (YAS Prologue)

These words have guided us for more than thirty years. This is our seventh General Chapter since *You Are Sent* was approved. We have met seven times, with *You Are Sent* as our guide. We have struggled to name what was “unfolding” for us at each of those meetings

We have . . .

- Made the concerns of the poor our own;
- Risked in faith for a more just and truly human world;
- Struggled in solidarity with those who are poor;
- Heard the cries of the earth and its people;
- And realized anew that “Love cannot wait.”

What are the challenges of the future that are calling out for our response today?  
What are the “urgent needs” that cannot be ignored at this particular time?

During this time, our time, the time since we last met in Chapter we have witnessed

- Paris Agreement on Climate Change
- Multiple terrorist actions around the world
- Unprecedented immigration/refugee crisis
- Pope Francis
- *Laudato Si'*
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Ebola epidemic
- Earthquake in Nepal
- Boko Haram kidnapping 276 school girls
- Brazil and South Korea impeaching their Presidents
- Malala Yousafzai awarded Nobel Peace Prize

And within our congregation we have seen

- The Congregational Novitiate established
- International meetings of Formators with Leadership and of Treasurers
- The *Shalom* Seminar
- The First International Leadership Conference with all provincial councils
- About 550 sisters have died and about 40 new members were professed

And now we ask, what is unfolding for us in 2017 and beyond?

What are the challenges of the future that are calling out for our response?

What are the “urgent needs” that cannot be ignored at this particular time?

We believe that we might look to *Laudato Si'* for some guidance in answering these questions. In the concluding paragraph, which you have on the handout you received, Pope Francis writes:

“God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. *Praise be to him!*” (245)

With these final words, Pope Francis summarizes the challenge of *Laudato Si'* – a challenge which calls us to “the heart of the world” and “impels us to find new ways forward.” Let us examine those challenges more closely.

## To Begin: Shared Wisdom

Our Chapter theme reminds us that we are called to be “content with little.” Pope Francis says we are called to give God “our all.”

These invitations to be “content with little,” and to “give God our all” can certainly be heard as a call to embrace our ever-changing realities within the congregation, the growing sense of internationality, our greater efforts at collaboration and what some have come to call our diminishment. We are fewer and we are older.

However, one of the responses to the congregation-wide dialogue proposes that we embrace our “wisdom rather than our diminishment.” Giving our all might mean that kind of refocus that draws on our years of living our SSND life in community and seeks to capture the wisdom we have gained. What have we learned in these 184 years of “responding to urgent needs, preferring the poor, and educating with a world vision”? (*You Are Sent* Prologue)

In the past, that shared wisdom has led us to places like Pakistan and South Sudan, Albania and Korea, Sweden, Liberia, and Belarus. We went to over 50 countries - and sometimes, our wisdom led us to know it was time to leave those same countries, and sometimes our wisdom

led us to sink deep roots into those countries. It has led us to the smallest villages and the largest cities, to kindergartens and to universities, to refugee camps and hospitals, to parishes and to retreat centers.

What wisdom can we bring from these experiences to our current world reality? Or as our sisters said to us in the congregation-wide dialogue, How can we “be faithful to the living charism while attending to the signs of the times?”

Our presence at the United Nations has afforded us opportunities to bring our wisdom and a deep understanding of the concerns of the poor to the discussions there about “Leaving No One Behind.” Our SSND experience with education that transforms in so many varied settings is a part of the on-going dialogues there about the need for universal primary education.

Because of the shared wisdom within our *Shalom* network many have made invaluable contributions to local efforts to address the scourge of human trafficking such as sisters in Canada who began a Stop Human Trafficking committee many years ago and hold educational days each year to educate youth and adults on trafficking.

Our efforts to, in the words of *Laudato Si'*, “care for our common home,” are enhanced by the Sisters in Nepal who have obtained grants to install solar panels on two classroom blocks, demonstrating to the village how resources can be sustainable.

The retired Sisters on the St. Louis Campus of the CP province are committed to *Shalom* values and began a Senior *Shalom* Club. They organized an educational series addressing racism after the shooting of an unarmed black man in their area.

Students in Brazil handed out peace cranes to people on the street wishing them peace on the International Day of Peace.

Sisters are teaching German and English to unaccompanied minors in Germany and Austria.

So now we ask, how can we continue to share our collective wisdom across the congregation and beyond?

## Secondly: In the heart of the world

We invite you to look at the phrase from that last paragraph of *Laudato Si'*, “In the heart of the world . . . the Lord of life is always present.” In the 1960s there was a popular play in New York City entitled “Stop the World, I Want to Get Off.” And certainly, most of us have felt that same sentiment at times. But Pope Francis reminds us that is it at the very heart of that world that “The Lord of Life is present.” We cannot “get off” the world, in fact, we are being called to go “to the heart of the world.”

Pope Francis' words remind us of the challenge of *Gaudium et Spes* that "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the (people) 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."

What is echoing in our hearts these days? In the Congregation-wide Dialogue, you, our sisters, mentioned care for creation, the plight of women and children, migration, human trafficking, and people on the margins as areas of concern at the heart of the world.

I remember clearly when I was first introduced to the reality of human trafficking. I was shocked. Until that time, I had no idea that women and children were being sold into modern day slavery. Now, at the heart of the world, that issue is unavoidable.

"In the heart of the world," we cannot help but see the over 65 million refugees searching for homes, for safety, and for freedom.

As we continue moving into the "heart of the world," what will we find there? What will call for our collective response? As we look at that question, it could be helpful to answer other questions such as – what breaks **your** heart as you look into the "heart of the world"? Where do "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age" find an echo in your heart?

And so we ask, what is at the heart of the world that is calling out for our response?

### Thirdly: Hearing the cries of the poor and the cries of the earth

As it says in *Laudato Si'*, "[God] has united himself definitively to our earth." Or as the theologian, Elizabeth Johnson explains it: "the whole rich tapestry of the created order has its own intrinsic value, because it is the place where God creatively dwells." (*Quest for the Living God*, Johnson, E., p. 198) Increasingly we have come to see all of creation as a revelation of our God or again, as Johnson says "if the Earth is indeed a sacrament of divine presence, then its ongoing destruction . . . is deeply sinful desecration." (ibid., p. 197) She even goes so far as to say that to let a species go extinct is like ripping a page from the Bible – it leaves us knowing less of the revelation of God.

Pope Francis in his message for the 2016 World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation proposes that the Works of Mercy be expanded to include care for our common home.

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a "grateful contemplation of God's world" (*Laudato Si'*, 214) which "allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us" (ibid., 85).

As you know, the Biblical corporal works of mercy challenge some of our assumptions and our patterns and call us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and visit the sick. To respond has required simple small gestures such as responding to a request for food. It has

also required large efforts such as offering shelter to a homeless refugee family, or urging our countries to provide services for those who are poor.

As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” and “makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world” (ibid., 230-31). Small daily practices such as recycling and responsible use of resources are part of our response to this invitation.

For me, one of the memorable moments from the 2015 *Shalom* Seminar is the morning where we gathered at 6 AM in front on the Generalate, where after a contemplative prayer, we walked down the hill and out of the gate, in silence, to clean the litter from the street. Gathering trash in silence that morning was an opportunity for all of us to reflect deeply on the meaning of that phrase – “common home.”

And still we must ask ourselves, are there larger, more complex actions and attitudes that will be part of our response to “care for our common home”?

Pope Francis calls it “Integral Ecology,” which combines environmental, economic, social and cultural concerns. He challenges our “throwaway culture” (ibid, 22) and talks about an “ecological debt” (ibid, 51) that exists between the north and the south. We know only too well that the environmental crisis of our times disproportionately affects those who are poor.

“The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” (ibid, 230), Yet we know that industrialized countries consume more than their fair share of the resources and that those who are poor suffer more than their fair share of the results.

And so we ask, what does it mean to care for “Our Common Home” in 2017 and beyond? How will we be sure that we hear the “cries of the poor AND the cries of the earth”? (ibid, 49)

## Lastly: Our new ways forward

If we are to embrace this challenge to live “in the heart of this world,” as *Laudato Si’* urges, we will acknowledge that our reality is not static, and that “God’s love constantly impels us to find new ways forward.”

These new ways forward will be shaped by the fact that we live in a time where technology can unite us as never before or it can rule our lives if we allow it. We live in a time of rapidly changing political realities. We live in a time where the very existence of the planet we call home is in jeopardy. We live in a time when there are more refugees and migrants seeking new homes than ever before in history.

And each day we are brought face to face with the implications of these realities – both positive and negative. And yet, “God’s love constantly impels us to find new ways forward.” These are the challenges for those of us “in the heart of the world.”

We SSNDs have a unique perspective to bring to that journey of finding a new way forward. We come with a deeply rooted conviction that we are called to “direct our entire lives toward that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent.” (YAS, C 4) And so, the paths forward that we will find are paths of dialogue, ever seeking understanding, and always valuing unity. Five years ago we said, “We embrace dialogue as a way of life.” We will need to do this again if we are to allow God to impel us forward into “the heart of the world,” a world that we could not have imagined even five years ago.

And so we end, where we began this morning – with the call of YAS,C 17 to become *painfully* aware” “work *actively* to confront root causes of injustice” “confront injustice *credibly*”, “live *simply*” and “value work *rightly*.”

And so we ask, in our constantly changing reality, what is *our* way forward into the heart of the world?

## Questions for Reflection after Part 2 of *Shalom*/NGO Report

What wisdom do we bring to our current world realities? How can we continue to share our collective wisdom across the congregation and beyond?

What breaks your heart as you look into the heart of the world? What is at the heart of the world that is calling out for our response?

What does it mean to care for “Our Common Home” in 2017 and beyond? How will we be sure that we hear the “cries of the poor AND the cries of the earth”?

In our constantly changing reality, what is *our* way forward into the heart of the world?