



A plastic bag and a stork in Spain

By Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, Director of SSND UN-NGO Office



Someone once said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Recently at the United Nations, I watched a photo exhibition entitled “[The Planet or Plastic](#),” compiled by the National Geographic Society. One photo by photographer John Cancalosi evoked so much in me that I have to tell you about it.

This particular picture was of a stork in Spain that had become engulfed in a plastic bag. Can you picture this image? Next to the photo was written: “Plastic bags are one of the most common types of single-use-and deadliest hazards to wildlife.” Another sign said: “A trillion plastic bags are used worldwide every year.”

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 127 State members have some kind of plastic bag legislation. Ninety-one State members have laws that ban or restrict manufacturing, importation, and marketing distribution of plastic bags.

Sadly, even with all this legislation, there is still a problem with plastic bag pollution. As I looked at the picture of the stork in the plastic bag, it was obvious to me why the stork became trapped.

It made me think and ask myself some questions: Where did this plastic bag come from? Why do we use plastic bags if this could be a possible result? How many plastic bags do I/people use daily? What do people do with “used” plastic bags? Do we even need plastic bags at all?

Again, a picture is worth a thousand words. [Here is a link to the photo online](#). Can we start a new conversation about using plastic bags? Have a discussion about this with your community, family, friends, or co-workers.

Are there alternatives?

For more information about plastic pollution visit: www.unesco.org

International Day of Peace: September 21



Climate Action

The theme for [World Peace Day](#) on September 21 is “**Climate Action for Peace**,” drawing on Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action. Goal 13 is a call for immediate action by all to lower greenhouse emissions, build resilience and improve education on climate change. #peaceday #climateaction

“It is possible to achieve our goals, but we need decisions, political will and transformational policies to allow us to still live in peace with our own climate.”

– Secretary-General
António Guterres,

SEDOS Seminar: “Mission in a Pluralistic World”

By Sister Kathy Schmittgens, International Shalom Coordinator



Mission in a Pluralistic World was the theme for this year’s [SEDOS](#) Seminar (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission), 28 April – 2 May in Ariccia, Italy. It involved looking at dialogue among different faiths. Each day focused on a different religious perspective – Judaism, Islam and Buddhism – with a presentation by a person from that faith, a presentation from a missionary who was involved in dialogue with that faith, and a presentation on some aspect of dialogue.

We were challenged by the caveat “nothing is as deceptive as the transposition of terms from one religion to another” (Jacques Bacot 1877-1965). Looking at the terms “justice”, “freedom” and “charity” from the perspective of how these terms are understood in another religion was enlightening.

Four sisters (*pictured above, left to right*), Antoinette Cornelius, Kathy Schmittgens, Dominica Sento, and Maria-Theresia Knippschild, attended the seminar; all felt enriched by the experience.

Sister Dominica: My main ministry as an SSND right now is as staff of the campus ministry room at Kyoto Notre Dame University. Every day, several students come in, stay, and go. Most of them are non-Catholic. I just stay there, listen to them if they want to talk, and let them be themselves. After I came back from the SEDOS seminar, I feel I can accept each student with a broader heart.

Sister Antoinette: I am so grateful for the opportunity to participate in the SEDOS Workshop which exposed me to women and men of different religious congregations, nationalities, cultures, and experiences.

The attitude of *Openness* to the process and showing keen interest is key to dialogue. The attitude of *Respect* – we approach each other with reverence and humility because we do not hold the absolute truth – each has just a piece of the truth

Empathy – to feel with and for – that is putting yourself in the position of the other and trying to walk in the shoes of the other. The shoe might be very tight on you or very loose on you but you try to wear it to feel with the other person.

Sister Maria-Theresia: For me, attending this year’s SEDOS seminar was a moving experience with so many religious from different communities and from different countries and cultures. In her opening address, *Mission as Interreligious Dialogue*, Sister Kathleen McGarvey, OLA, raised the question of whether interfaith dialogue should be understood as a path of mission or mission as an interfaith dialogue. No matter which direction you go, one basic concern remains: “As people of faith, Christians and Muslims, men and women, we are called to open to one another as gifts within and through which the mystery of God, God’s Word, and the mystery of humanity, is continuously revealed.” It is through this attitude of openness that (interfaith) dialogue becomes possible. As an SSND, I add: Read and live the points of *Love Gives Everything*. They provide the help, which is necessary for interfaith dialogue.

(See [SEDOS Bulletin Vol. 51, Num.5/6](#) for talks from the seminar.)



Graphic used to promote the SEDOS Seminar 2019.

Living *Laudato Si'*

By Sister Kathy Schmittgens, International Shalom Coordinator



On May 15, JPIC promoters in Rome had the privilege of hearing Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, SDB, Coordinator of the sector on Ecology and Creation in the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development ([DPIHD](#)).

The first and foremost mission of the dicastery is to make *Laudato Si'* known and implemented. This includes the animation of the “Season of Creation”, promotion of an authentic Theology of Creation, promotion of Ecological education at various levels, and collaborating with all others involved in care of creation.

They hope to establish study groups on various aspects of *Laudato Si'* – integral ecology and integral human development, concept of the common good, the sustainable development goals, young people and the care of our common home, indigenous communities, and fundamental human rights, etc.

They have concrete action plans which include switching to renewable energies, cutting waste and the use of plastics. The hope is to make the Vatican completely “carbon neutral”. Most exciting were the plans he shared for *Laudato Si' 2020*.

Special plans are underway for World Day of Peace, the Lenten Season, World Water Day, an “Economy of Francis” meeting in Assisi, and a “Villaggio per la Terra”, a week-long celebration with public participation for Earth Day.

For the Season of Creation they will open the ***Laudato Si'* Living Chapel**. This will be an artistic installation with plants and earth materials modelled on the Porziuncola chapel in Assisi. The chapel is designed as a material embodiment of *Laudato Si'*. It is designed to “pilgrim” around the world, beginning with Assisi.

For us, also, it is important to consider how *we* will help with the promotion of *Laudato Si'* and convey the urgency of keeping our planet viable for future generations!

Read also: “[1.5 degrees celsius: a physical, moral and theological threshold](#)” (08 October 2018, *THE TABLET*)

Commission on the Status of Women



by Sister Eileen Reilly, Director of SSND UN-NGO Office

SSND was well represented at the UN Commission on the Status of Women by five SSNDs and 19 of our students and colleagues from Hungary, Brazil and the USA. Notre Dame of Maryland University and high schools in the USA, Brazil, and Hungary sent students and faculty.

The week-long experience gave the participants opportunities to explore the many dimensions of the theme of providing social protection to empower women and girls and promote gender equality. More information is available on the congregational website (<https://gerhardinger.org>): [Ministry > UN-NGO > SSND at CSW63](#)

THE AMAZON CRIES OUT!

By Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, Director of SSND UN-NGO Office



We are indigenous

“Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”
– Pope Francis

This quote summarizes the essence of my thoughts from several presentations I attended last April at the 18th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues ([UNPFII](#)), which captured my attention because many sessions focused on the Amazon. My first thought was: “How does the Amazon impact the rest of the planet?” By the end of the forum, I learned several things, for example, the Amazon is home to 390 different communities with their own cultural identities; its forest produces 20% of the world’s oxygen and has the most extensive biodiversity on the earth; and most importantly, its natural and cultural heritage is threatened by extractive industries and infrastructure projects. For us, as School Sisters of Notre Dame, it is most important to remember that we are present in Brazil and Peru which are two of the nine countries that cross the Amazon.

This information helped me realize that the Amazon, is not “just a place” on the map; its survival is crucial to the rest of the planet. There is a domino effect that happens every time something or someone misuses or disrespects the environment and the people of the Amazon. As a result, the Amazon is crying out for help. How is it that a place has a voice?

That voice comes from two people who know, love, and have lived in the Amazon. Jair Reis’s voice pleaded with us: “The Amazon cries out from so much destruction and oppression. Today, life is very difficult for us because our land is being destroyed and taken away from us.” And, Justino Rezende, SDB, PhD, an indigenous priest, said: “Many people are dying, not only physically, but also spiritually because they are deeply connected with mother nature; if the Amazon dies, they die too.” As the voice of the Amazon, he closed his remarks saying, “If you are listening, speak up and share this information with all people.”

Now, I have also become a part of the Amazon’s voice, as I pass on these thoughts to you. If you are reading this note...you too can become the Amazon’s voice crying out for LIFE!

For more information about this topic visit [GreenPeace: Amazon Rain Forest](#) and [The Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region](#).

A word from Sister Eileen Reilly



On July 1, after nine amazing years as your SSND UN-NGO Representative, I concluded my time in this ministry. Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia (CP) has now assumed this role. I will forever be grateful for having had this opportunity to serve the congregation and to meet so many sisters in so many places. You give me hope for our future when you respond to invitations to observe UN days like World Peace Day, when you welcome me into your homes and ministries, and when you and your students participate in UN events. Thank you for all of your support and encouragement – which I feel confident you will continue to give Beatriz as she moves into this ministry.

**Shalom/UN-NGO Newsletter is a triannual 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.**
