

Our Environmental Way of Proceeding

moving our ecology strategy and action plan

Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP)

March 2011

*In August 2010 the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) together with its lay apostolic partners laid out the Ecology Strategy and Action Plan towards achieving “**Reconciliation with Creation**” drawn from the discussion of the decree on mission, 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.*

The Conference acknowledged the need for finding ways in which our experiences could interact with our institutes, and our research and advocacy could have strategic practical benefits for our society and environment. Reconciliation with Creation is a concern of the whole Conference and it seeks expression in how we live and what we do.

*The Ecology Task Force of Asia Pacific met in February 2011 and finalized **Our Environmental Way of Proceeding** as the overarching introductory document for us to connect our diverse efforts in ecological relations and ground our values. It is rooted in our spirituality, seeking deeper relations with creation. This document serves as the basis to move our ecology strategy and action plan.*

Pedro Walpole

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL WAY OF PROCEEDING

How are we challenged to act with ecological responsibility today?

We know there are many problems and much mismanagement in how we as human societies affect the earth's ecology. Many experts are analyzing the causes and effects of the changing ecological patterns of the world. We as individuals, in institutions and communities know we have to be transformed in how we live, but given the design of the support systems and production lines that make up society as we know it we face great challenges in grasping the complexity of the problem and finding solutions. Taking responsibility for our actions is clearly needed, yet few people are confident in where to begin and how to take practical steps that bring us together to make a difference.

If we could simply solve the ecological problem would this give us a better world?

Pope John Paul II called for "ecological conversion." Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed this statement during the 2010 World Day of Peace by saying, "if you want to cultivate peace, protect creation." This brings us to the deeper dimension of the relations in creation and not simply our ecological concerns. In experiencing creation as the basis for supporting and celebrating all life we realize creation is an ongoing gift in our relationships with God and neighbour. God's creative action establishes all that is good and through Noah's relation with God and his action we see creation sustained. Christ as the new creation promises that he is with us seeking to establish God's reign of peace on earth and salvation of all creation. We need to share in the continuous creative action of God.

How are we to live this out; what is our response?

Humbly, we acknowledge our limitations and by sharing in the Jesuit mission of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus we take up the central theme of reconciliation with creation, with neighbour and with God. We start from a deep gratitude for the gift of all life and our personal decisions, witness, and commitment to establish right relations, are not simply to sustain us in our comfort zone. This gives us courage to seek partnership in caring for our earth. We revise our sense of this being "our" earth and what our attitude needs to be in this relation. We have learned we do not own the earth but that we belong to it. This relationship of belonging is foundational and dynamic, and in calling us to care draws out our deepest humanity.

Peace and sustainable ecology are the woof and warp of our human reconciliation with creation. The gratitude and hope inside us and in our relations with others needs to change how we govern the use of natural and mineral resources. Resources have already become international sources of conflicts and a basis for war. Our way of proceeding begins with experiences of gratitude, hope and responsibility; and engages as an advocacy for healing. This approach is continuous with social healing extending to the land and all life. Enriched relations are sought through spirituality, humanity and creation.

We seek deeper relations with creation and actions based on culture, knowledge and informed conscience, with concern for all life and for our neighbour. In the Asia Pacific region we draw on diverse peoples, ecology, resources, beliefs, situations and learning. There are many who are already working with deep integrity and right relations in this sphere.

Jesuits and lay partners are asked to first establish credibility in our own homes and institutes as a basis for more effectively engaging in greater ecological responsibility with others.

Where and how do we begin our “ecological conversion”?

Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J. spoke of “our way of proceeding” as captured in the 34th General Congregation: Decree 26:1-9. In using this approach we draw out seven points deepening our response to the challenge of reconciliation with creation in our lives and institutes.

1. *We acknowledge God as Creator of all life and find some quiet moment each day to appreciate this with gratitude.*
2. *We as an apostolic body seek to reflect and speak of what we experience and discern of our relationship with and responsibility for the natural systems.*
3. *We recognize that the children we see today inherit this living world and as we choose to sustain it by finding God at work in all things, we humbly work with young people.*
4. *We seek to reach out in hope to the poor who are increasingly losing their livelihoods and ecological sustainability and incorporate their concerns in our care for the web of life.*
5. *We support good actions in contemporary culture and explore needed alternatives with decision; we partner with others broadening our capacity to transform environmental attitudes and relations.*
6. *We seek the greater good of finding how people can work with the gifts of creation; we live life as a mission, to heal and share with others the fullness of life.*
7. *We accept the challenge of living sustainably in the world.*

We can now look at these in more detail.

1. We acknowledge God as Creator of life and find some quiet moment each day to appreciate this with gratitude.

If we are to succeed in responding to our global environmental crisis, our response needs to come from a deep experience of hope. As Jesuits and partners, we begin with the attitude of finding God through creation as Ignatius did. We seek to understand like the Early Church Fathers the deep relation between the Book of Revelation and the Book of Nature as a qualitative expression of God’s creative presence that allows us to feel God’s hand running through all life. We find these relationships in creation through the Spirit who invigorates us to read carefully with hope the Signs of the Times in our care for all life.

This experience comes from a deep personal love of Jesus Christ, the gift of which runs counter to the culture of consumerism and seeks right relations with God neighbour and creation. We are dependent on the richness and constant rebirth of the land and seas; yet many of us are blinded by an urban self-sufficiency that places the problems elsewhere. We need to experience this gratitude as grace and share it with others.

We need to experience with gratitude the gift of our institutions. We operate through our institutions of learning not because of our own effort but as a product of grace, the history of working with others and the resources given.

Science plays a very important role in environmental research and management but cannot answer all questions of the mind, and does not answer the heart. We need to learn to appreciate our beautiful mornings, children playing in the rain, a cherry tree in flower, and insights and excellence of the human mind as we move towards

reconciliation with creation. Respect for life is a mystical experience, showing us the connectedness of all life. Our Asia Pacific cultures are rooted in this mystical understanding and are a source we can draw on in renewing our attitudes, deepening our commitment and directing our human knowledge.

Our response to ecological crises from local to global cannot simply come from the power of technological resolution, polity, and application. We need to acknowledge the uncertainty of what the future holds and the interdependence of all systems ecological and social. The problem is not to be outsourced to the experts but we are all called both to seek a greater knowledge of nature and experience our interrelatedness and deeper gratitude for the meaning of life.

2. We as an apostolic body seek to reflect and speak of what we experience and discern of our relationship with and responsibility for the earth's natural systems.

We are formed in conscience and bound in unity by the experiences we reflect upon that guide us to shared and discerned actions across all our ministries. It is from the experience of gratitude not power over creation that our attitudes and expectations change and we learn to engage with greater resilience.

All of us live in relation with the natural world even when we do not recognize it. Many of us are prevented from receiving immediate feedback about the impact of our lifestyles. Complex systems provide for consumer needs based on resources coming from distant geographic areas where we may not be aware of our collective social and ecological impact. Short-term marketability becomes the basis for "resource development" and the greater

interrelatedness is lost. We need to discuss and engage with the business world the ecological concerns and quality of life, especially of the poor.

The account of conscience that is a reflection on our fidelity to a shared and cared for world, bonds us with others, strengthening our sense of work and celebration. We have a bond that brings us beyond consumerism and comfort to Christ and the service of all people. This allows us to more deeply consider others in our communication of the objectives, decisions and actions. In this we share hope and seek accountability with humility.

Reflecting on our own way of doing things using the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises helps us see the conflicts between how we live personally, in community, institutionally on campus and in society and what we feel needs to be done. We come to better understand the basic justice and right relations needed, how others are working for a better environment and the choices we can make together. We find the strength for what we truly feel needs to be done by working in unity of purpose to take responsibility for the world's natural resources.

3. We recognize that the children we see today inherit this living world and as we choose to sustain it by finding God at work in all things, we humbly work with young people.

We experience God as working in all of creation in a way that we can live out this relation in all we do. In this way we acknowledge the good in all life and its gift to us, and how we are to work knowing the initiative is through God. God is working, and has always been working in creation and this sensitivity draws out the human

generational response going beyond immediate interests and relating to all humanity and all generations.

Often we are caught up with day-to-day activities and commitments, taking no time to pause and seek a deeper attitude of God's grace. We may respond to our daily disruptions based on our own judgment, thinking that it is the best solution or possible response. Recognizing God working through creation and the need for a generational response allows us to seek God while working with the problem, not simply giving thanks in the resolution of the problem.

The spirituality that allows us to have the necessary attitudinal change also allows us to communicate deeply with others.

In working with Christ we focus on healing and avoid being overtaken by the turmoil. This is the contemplative in action, when we recognize Christ labouring in the world and join in that labour for others. In this we know the world is not ours and we live today not for ourselves but for those around us and for the generations to come. We learn that anything we take must not be taken from others or from the sustainability of the land and seas or from the sustainability of our children and of their children.

Young people often express a freedom in asking the most truth revealing questions and yet many are so easily captured by the things of the world and unhealthy ways of living and communicating. We are losing familiarity with all that is involved in working the land and experiencing nature. Today, fifty percent of the world's population is urbanized. Young people are increasingly alienated from creation as the generational connection is lost.

As we work to strengthen the ecological dimension in our lives this is a key opportunity to accompany the youth in strengthening their sense of connectivity and conscience in the world. As we listen deeply to them we may be able to encourage them to seek what is life giving and advocate for the real changes needed to sustain their generation and those to come. Together we can maintain the focus through reflection and action.

4. We seek to reach out in hope to the poor who are increasingly losing their livelihoods and ecological sustainability and incorporate their concerns in our care for the web of life.

Can we engage the world today and stand in solidarity with the poor without dealing with the global ecological concerns?

The world especially the poor, the youth and those who struggle need hope. We engage with hope and fidelity from the spiritual depth of recognizing Christ in our people and our land while listening to their story and how they seek justice and a new reconciliation. The needs of the poor are great and in seeking reconciliation with creation, we seek anew to be reconciled with the poor and address their daily needs and impacts on the land and the hopes of their children.

Concern for the environment draws a limited response from many as there is little focus given to such a holistic concern far from daily details and fragmented activities of a global world. Everyone is now affected by environmental degradation: pollution, droughts and floods; however, the burden is not evenly spread.

The poor bear the greater burden whether in overpopulated cities or marginal rural environments. Urban pollution in many of our cities is something accepted; the loss of air quality and congestion is a cost people are all subjected to in the hours before and after school or work in many of our cities, but the poor both at work and where they live are more exposed to the problem. The environment of garbage dumps as locations for livelihoods of thousands of people takes a long time to reform needing much greater change in the lifestyles, manufacturing and markets that produce the waste. The quality of housing and services are not adequate in sustaining dignified living for most of the urban poor. We lack not only the social prioritization and political will, but also the household to market accountability to collectively transform the quality of urban living for all.

“Marginal environments” usually have low productivity, but are a critical source for ecological services affecting urban life. Soil erosion is too often taken as the cost of production and market competitiveness. The natural forest on the mountains may sustain our water cycle and be a seasonal occasion for recreation while the local population may not be adequately supported in the sustaining these beneficial resources and their own basic needs.

How do we show solidarity with those who live in this urban degradation and to the other half of the world living in rural and often marginal environments?

We are learning of the interconnectivity of degraded environments, increased risks and disasters, resource conflicts, weakening ecological services, lack of livelihood security, loss of food quality and forced migration. The poor bare the greater part of this burden. We know that many of our economic systems create and sustain

poverty and degradation across the world and this is one of the greatest burdens we give to the next generation.

One of the important sources of relation with creation comes from indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are increasingly marginalized by the growing global demand for natural and mineral resources; they are also marginalized by the shortcomings in delivery of basic services and security of livelihood in many parts of the world; and inadequate attention is paid to their language, culture and relation to the land.

The training and technologies of our institutions are beginning to focus on responding to the needs of the poor. We have a long way to go in strengthening life giving systems of resource use in our societies. Fundamental to this is our commitment to communities to strengthen their sense of meaning in life and their resilience on the land with sustainable practices and market engagement.

5. We support good actions in contemporary culture and explore needed alternatives with decision; we partner with others broadening our capacity to transform attitudes and relations.

This is the frontier where we seek greater engagement for ecological accountability in continuing culture. How do we respect the riches of creation and work for the reconciliation we need?

Today we are using all human means to understand the ecological systems of the Earth, the local environments and their sustainability. We are challenged to engage with greater care and develop organizational systems and processes that centre on ecological systems. We are called to renew our sense of identity as

we transform our relations with the environment, adjust the ecological footprint of our consumption, learn to listen to others and give deeper meaning to life.

Our institutions are looked upon as centres of learning and dialogue and resources for society as a whole for engaging in complex concerns. Many of our Jesuit initiatives of higher education are partnering in this learning and strengthening their areas of critical contribution to environmental management and our schools are developing ecological awareness and accountability of the students, staff, and parents. We are challenged to participate and strengthen environmental responsibility, have the management of our institutes' environment and waste as working examples of what can be done and clearly engage in the transformation of right relations with all.

We need greater collaboration and networks amongst Jesuit institutions and with lay partners. We partner with other organizations and social strategies to broaden our capacity to impact greater social and ecological order that is in keeping with our commitment to justice. Through engagement programs we reach out with the youth to understand the lives of the poor. We learn to listen and accompany them in areas of capacity building, and livelihood options seeking a more secure and sustainable world.

Especially through our dialogue with indigenous peoples we learn of deep relations with the land and respect for creation, we learn the value of diversity in culture and in biodiversity and so we learn how to work and seek new initiatives that bring about greater ecological and cultural security.

6. We seek the greater good of finding how people can work with the gifts of creation. We live life as a mission to heal and share with others the fullness of life.

The role of the elders and the wise in our Asia Pacific region is often to heal, to elucidate virtue not simply to teach. People, communities and the earth need healing. We have to layout clear faith values in which to root our functional values and attitudes in society and ensure that the options for the poor give greater security against environmental risks and greater security of livelihood. We need to engage so that the availability of products on the market does not seduce us into immediate and seemingly easy, but short sighted, responses that entrap us.

In our shared mission to heal we use our knowledge, draw on different cultural experiences, seek God's grace, celebrate life and put this to use for the present generations with joy. We share a mission in searching for the greater good, in seeking new ways of living the challenge of reconciliation. Witnessing through personal choice in the public culture without imposing does help others engage in new opportunities for action and also reduce personal consumption where excessive. As personal and public attitudes change and also given the witness and credibility of individual and institutional action, the impact of lifestyle changes, training and programs are more likely to increase and connect. This further strengthens the needed language and discipline in a relations-based response to the environment.

This is the renewed charism of seeking God in all things. It is inseparable from our charism and commitment for justice and peace. If we are to care for the common good, we cannot take a step forward without it being in the context of creation, without

recognizing the need for good governance and management of the earth's natural and mineral resources.

The mission of reconciliation with creation is in all areas where we face change, in the social, cultural, youth, pastoral, refugees, educational, intellectual and organizational frontiers of our work. Faced with many limitations we know we have to learn a new way of living as community and as society. There are many Jesuits and partners working at the frontiers who give witness in caring for creation. We need to share much more widely and deeply in our different cultures in Asia Pacific a meaningful faith-based ecological witness with those who suffer and those who yearn for peace across the land.

7. We accept the challenge of contributing to a more sustainable world.

Today we are uncertain of the world's future and accept with hope the challenge of transformation in those attitudes and actions that negatively impact on the environment and the options of the poor and those of future generations. Our hope and resilience come from understanding these impacts and how to work better in community and society with creation while sharing in the spirit of all life with all people. This response is rooted in a deep desire for a just and caring society reconciling with God, neighbour and creation.

As a result our ecological strategy is the concern of the whole Conference and seeks expression:

- through our institutions and lifestyles,
- through formation of young people, lay and scholastic,
- through governance of natural resources.

This commitment is rooted in our spirituality, seeking deeper relations with creation. This document serves as the basis to move this ecology strategy and emerging action plan.