

## Franciscans in Glasgow, Woodford and the world.

There is a net work of Franciscan-minded Christians around the world, many of them concerned with Justice and Peace initiatives. These have for some years brought to their collaborations more vitality, through *Franciscans International*, based in Geneva. As a 'non-governmental organisation' their NGO role at the UN has allowed members from diverse local communities to achieve mutual supportiveness, for people whose harsh circumstances include migration, large climate changes, gender inequality, and cultural exclusion of vulnerable sections of a population. Franciscan spirituality aims to nurture sensitive concern for such neighbours. Listening well, and talking with a real commitment to mercy, is crucial to our faith. This same outlook will prove important likewise within the Church's 'Synodal Process' over coming months and years. We discover new life in our communities of faith by exploring conversations of mercy with fellow believers. Because of the COP26 Conference happening in Glasgow, a small group of lay and religious, Franciscan in their outlook, came to Scotland this year to be involved, to speak their fears to Nichola Sturgeon, but also to make new friendships through the sharing spirit of peace.

A Zoom Webinar during the first week of November 2021 (Google 'Franciscans at COP26') provides an insight into the Christian call to examine what we refer to as 'stewardship of Creation. This is not sentimentalising St. Francis, but digging deeply into his spirit. (Google 'Franciscans International' for an archive of newsletters). They are urging that the UN should uphold 'the right to a healthy environment' as a norm everywhere. They provide also 'A Toolbox on Human Rights, Climate Policies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).' The video from this team includes a song, 'Rescue the lost and forgotten of this earth,' to promote the aim of 'defending a healthy planet.' Policy coherence is needed if we are to reach 'just energy transitions' for every endangered region. This involves 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) that can focus on genuine environmental prospects locally, with better ambitions. Those willing to "Give the Earth a Voice" will need 'a many-pronged approach' to recovering bio-diversity.

Ben Ayodi was the Kenyan Capuchin narrator of this webinar. He pointed to the 120,000 signatures so far gathered in support of a *Laudato Si'* petition. The group was based at the friary of Duns Scotus in Glasgow and included from the Philippines a sister and Angel Cortez, a friar, Lindlyn Momo, a married woman from Cameroon active in South Africa, Budi Tjahiona from Indonesia, Markus Heinze from Germany, George Smulski OFM of the Glasgow community, welcoming all participants, and Anglican Society of St. Francis members, Clark Berge and their Minister general Christopher John (in the Solomon Islands). Sister Monica Partac read the prayer: "Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one." A book called *Seeing Differently*, on accompaniment, community and Nature is available from the SSF members.

Among the concerns from different regions were how corrupt officials from logging companies take bribes, and ruthless extractive mining activities in Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Philippines. The negative outcomes of such powerful business intrusions include disproportionate harm done to those with disabilities, vulnerable children, the collapsing integrity of all eco-systems, the loss of sustainable life-styles previously working well amongst indigenous populations, lost inter-generational equity (of realistic employment over lifetimes), and a legacy of unrelieved pollution. We heard about experiences of a shared organic model farm to mitigate climate problems. These recovery ventures might be of many kinds, such as tackling soil erosion and diminishing water resources, the challenge of illegal and excessive fishing, and communities needing appropriate orientation guidance for climate emergencies, with dangers about to increase. Those who become more involved can also offer recommendations to agencies, charitable organisations and local government. At grassroots level, the ability to celebrate even a small community living with authenticity is valuable. Faith groups can become 'harbingers of hope,' improving conditions for bees and insects, laying in new hedgerows. A central feature of many situations is the recognition that environmental damage steadily ruins human relationships, and also ways to improve relationships with the many other creatures that seen together make for sustainable ecology. These aspects of eco-conversion are also being discussed in places like Woodford, with its Franciscan tradition on the edge of London, where a number of ideas like wilding gardens or planting trees are being taken up.