

Lessons from Catholic Conferences



Jesuit University in the 21st Century: A Project of Hope for the World

Loyola University, Seville, Spain - June 4-6

Ten Years of *Laudato Si'*: Challenges and Hope

Pontificia Università Gregoriana, The Vatican, Rome - June 12-14

Jesuit Integral Ecology Assembly

Loyola University Chicago - June 17-20

International Association of Jesuit Universities Assembly

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia - June 21-23

Iris Stewart-Frey

Members of the EJ & Common Good Initiative will present our take-aways from the four international Catholic conferences on integral ecology that we participated in this summer.

Thanks to the Ignatian Center for supporting us to participate in them.

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The global context is increasingly urgent and difficult – Harm to socio-ecological systems and the political systems' capacity to respond is accelerating

Action-oriented hope is increasingly important in education and public discourse – We need to provide the kind of hope that sparks well-informed and strategic action to walk with youth and the most vulnerable, and to care for our common home



Climate Strike, Toronto, 2019

Chad Raphael

The global context is increasingly urgent and difficult: Presentations at each conference highlighted the acceleration of the degradation of socio-ecological systems, which poses a profound and urgent threat to human and planetary well-being. Time is running out to avoid multiple tipping points, after which we may not be able to undo damages to our common home for generations or centuries. At the same time, the political context is worsening as the U.S. Administration's withdrawal from the Paris Accords and from providing foreign aid is giving other governments a license to backtrack from their commitments to social, climate and environmental justice. Civil society organizations and educational institutions need to fill this leadership gap as best we can.

Action-oriented hope, drawing on *Laudato Si'*, is increasingly important in public discourse: A common theme across the conferences is that *Laudato Si'* and Jesuit education must provide the kind of hope that sparks well-informed and strategic action to walk with the most vulnerable, and to care for our common home and its inhabitants. Pope Francis' analysis, which Pope Leo appears to support fully, continues to offer a compelling and unifying framework that integrates action for environmental and social justice with personal and spiritual transformation.

See <https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2025/06/19/environmental-justice-lessons-for-a-new-dark-age-testimonies-from-the-frontlines-of-climate-change/>

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Coal-fired power plant, Springdale, PA

"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out."

- Václav Havel



Memphis sanitation workers strike, 1968

"Hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. [Hope] is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency."

- Rebecca Solnit

Chad Raphael

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Learn from the 1980s Environmental Justice Movement

Build an Inclusive Movement – Build solidarity among people of different races and ethnicities, genders, classes, and faiths.

Appeal to Common Values – Frame ecological justice in terms of health, dignity, and foundational American values as well as Catholic ideals.

Build Grassroots-Led Networks – Emphasize community organizing and accountability from the ground up, not top-down change.

Practice Community-Engaged Research and Lawyering – Ensure academic, legal, and policy strategies are guided by and serve community needs.



Shamyra Lavigne-Davey,
RISE St. James

Chad Raphael

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Intensifying global crises and simultaneous crises fatigue

- Unprecedented run on exploiting Earth's resources - water, soils, minerals, ocean, space
- Declining consideration of the most vulnerable
- Intersection with human dignity and freedom
- Public discourse has turned non-apologetic
- Responsibility of Catholic institutions for ethical and spiritual guidance



Iris Stewart-Frey

SCU is making a unique contribution to Jesuit education as a thought leader on community-engaged research for environmental justice: We were invited to present to these international conferences as recognized authorities on how Jesuit institutions can collaborate with each other and with community partners to address the ecological crisis through community-engaged research conducted by faculty and students, and how to provide faculty development that supports teaching and research on ecological justice. These efforts were recognized as models for expanding to Jesuit education networks globally. This is one of SCU's distinct strengths in thought leadership that already exists and does not need to be invented anew. It is rooted in the communities most vulnerable to the crisis. We should continue to participate actively in international networking and collaborative projects that draw on our strengths and the collective capacities of Jesuit higher education.

SCU is making significant contributions to realizing the Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Preferences: A recent [survey](#) of the implementation of Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preference 4 (Caring for Our Common Home), presented at several of these summer conferences, recommends additional efforts in areas that we at SCU are addressing now: enhancing ecological education, empowering and benefiting marginalized communities, scaling our impacts by promoting justice and rights, and tackling systemic challenges. These are powerful rationales we can use in proposals to Catholic funders and donors.

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A Catholic-Inspired Response

- Leadership from the Global South
- Vatican continues to prioritize the importance of implementing the calls of Laudato Si
- Regional Jesuit/Catholic networks to foster partnerships
 - e.g. UNIJES, Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa, COMPARTE, Kircher, Jesuits Worldwide



Iris Stewart-Frey

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Source: [The Guardian](#). A caribou herd in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge, the traditional homelands of the Ifupiat and Gwich'in peoples

A Special Responsibility for Jesuit/Catholic Universities

- Call to step up and speak up in times of intensifying crises, need of courage for hope
- Educate for social, relational, and environmental responsibility, truth seeking
- Opportunity in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborative work that walks with communities
- Leverage networks for action

Iris Stewart-Frey

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International Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (IAJU) – *is a beautiful network of 200+ institutions, and you are part of it.*



Assembly Themes

- Student Mental & Spiritual Health
- Democracy & Global Citizenship
- *Environmental Justice*
- Artificial Intelligence
- Collaboration in Jesuit Higher Education



Chris Bacon

The mural is from a series of art procured by Luis Bueno (Guararema, Brasil, 1980),

We should discern which of the following opportunities to collaborate and lead we want to prioritize and resource now: Here are some actions that were highlighted at all four conferences:

- Forming an IAJU Sustainability Network with regional and/or thematic nodes and an Environmental Justice Observatory that puts integral ecology into practice with demonstrable results. This network and observatory might facilitate collaboration to monitor, study, and disseminate information about environmental conditions and changes. They might also support transdisciplinary collaboration on research projects that inform advocacy.
- Sharing models for implementing and evaluating sustainability strategic plans and policies, as well as ecological formation, with students and staff. This might involve creating platforms and opportunities to share institutional policies and programs, planning models, and collaborative teaching, research, and student exchanges.
- Establishing a shared University Socio-Environmental Responsibility evaluation model to assess progress toward our goals.

SCU and our Environmental Justice & the Common Good Initiative could respond in several additional specific ways:

- Developing signature projects based on the framework of integral ecology that are community engaged and that center student learning. These could be built in collaboration with other Jesuit universities and other campus units (e.g., the Ignatian Center, the Miller Center, the Markkula Center, the Frugal Innovation Hub, the Center for Sustainability, etc.)
- Collaborating on a virtual Laudato Si' Conference with Javariana and other universities that we have begun to network with at the conferences we were part of this summer.
- Partnering with universities in South America (Javariana), Mexico (ITESO), and the U.S. (Loyola University Chicago, Gonzaga, and perhaps Fordham) to develop a proposal to create an Environmental Justice Observatory in the Americas.
- Developing student exchange activities and other joint projects with IAJU member institutions.

Lessons from Catholic Conferences



Panel 3: Environmental Justice: Responding to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor

Two inventories among Jesuits in higher ed found 1000s of programs, and:

- Urgent need to integrate environmental justice into our teaching, community partnerships, & governance
- Strategically invest in environmental leadership.
- Incentivize cross institutional collabs.
- **Deepen and diversify dialogues => practical action => action + reflection => transformation**



Chris Bacon

Chris led a panel including [Nancy Tuchman](#) (Founding Dean, School of Environmental Sustainability, Loyola University Chicago), Provost [Maria Adelaida Farah](#) (Javeriana), [Fr. Roberto Jaramillo](#), SJ (Secretary for Social Justice and Ecology, Rome), [Rev. Dr. Pravene Martis, SJ](#) (St. Aloysius University, India), and Fr. [François Kabore, SJ](#) (founding President, Kosyam Jesuit University of Science, Burkina Faso), who explored how Jesuit institutions can scale climate action and deepen community-engaged environmental justice.

Lessons from Catholic Conferences

My take home points @SCU

1. Build from our vision... cultivating knowledge & faith to build a more just and sustainable world, and strengths in community-engaged research and learning for environmental justice.
2. Institutionalize Laudato Si' Planning and action through key campus units.
3. Launch grant fund with 1-2 other universities for Laudato Si' inspired collaboration research and pedagogy.

Example of a collab:



Chris Bacon

Debt cancellation for poor countries.

1. Strengthening the Loss and Damage Fund to support those most affected by the climate crisis.
2. A just energy transition that respects human rights and prioritizes sustainable livelihoods.
3. Promotion of food sovereignty through agroecological practices.