

# Letter from the Director of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

As we go to press with this issue of *Working Notes*, we at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice are keenly aware of how the theme of “Integral Ecology” might appear distant from the pressing concerns of the pandemic. But appearances can deceive.

While Pope Francis does not mention the risk of novel coronavirus in *Laudato Si'*, his leitmotif of “rapidification” (§18) describes perfectly the kind of ecosystem pressure that allowed what we now call Covid-19 to jump from its original source into the human population. In his ground-breaking encyclical, Francis teaches us that everything is interconnected (§70). Integral ecology is not just a framework that allows us to consider the relationship between decarbonisation and just transitions, but between markets in Wuhan province and nursing homes in Westmeath.

The Society of Jesus in Ireland and elsewhere has been hard hit by this virus. We have lost a number of men to Covid-19. They will be sorely missed and deeply grieved. Others have been afflicted with this horrible disease but have thankfully recovered. Jesuits around the world are working to address this crisis with almost 500 different Jesuit works supporting at least 3 million people. With so many people on the frontlines, it is impossible not to worry about the toll of this disease for our Society. But the work that is being done is of the highest value and consequently we accept this risk as part of our call to respond.

This response varies from place to place; with our concern around the pandemic not limited to within the boundaries of our island. In Ireland, the Jesuit Refugee Service is eager to resume its work of accompaniment in Direct Provision Centres. Until such a time as that is possible, they are running the national hotline to support those seeking asylum who have been affected by Covid-19. Jesuit relief works in the camps of South Sudan, which was recently documented by Newstalk radio,<sup>1</sup> are addressing the immediate public health needs of people living in a time of fragile peace after years of conflict. Jesuits around the world are also joining a call, as part of a comprehensive response in the global south, for a decisive and transformative debt cancellation program.<sup>2</sup>

We are all connected. We know this in a visceral way when a loved one dies. The pain of separation is a testimony to the bond that was shared. As we go to press, we know that many who appreciate the work of the Jesuit Centre are heavy burdened by grief. Our prayers are with those who are suffering. Our commitment to live out the Christian faith in pursuit of social justice is intensified in this trying time.

Dr Ciara Murphy was planning this issue long before Covid-19 surfaced in Hubei Province, but the pieces she has assembled reflect in their diversity how any realistic response to the crises we face must be understood in their complexity and approached humanistically. The damage caused by rapidification cannot be undone by more productivity or efficiency. A

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Cahill, *Moving Forward Documentary on Newstalk*, <https://www.newstalk.com/documentary-and-drama-on-newstalk/moving-forward-documentary-newstalk-1015197>.

<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit Conference of European Provincials, *Solidarity and the Coronavirus Crisis*, <https://jesc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Solidarity-and-the-Coronavirus-Crisis.pdf>.

different logic must prevail. It is five years since Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'* but his message has renewed relevance in this era of *Covidtide*. Francis teaches us that “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (LS’ §229). Another word for this shared responsibility is love, which is not just a private virtue, but a public commitment. Policy shaped by love is an integral component of any just response to the crises we now face. The pandemic reminds us, painfully, that we are not in control. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. We have today. We can draw upon what we learned yesterday. But the only way we can hope for a better future tomorrow is if we face it together, in solidarity. Integral ecology, which insists that the problems of the environment and the problems of society are intricately linked, has never been more relevant and more promising.

I commend this issue of *Working Notes* to you and I hope it provokes fertile thinking and inspires loving action.

*Fr John Guiney SJ*

