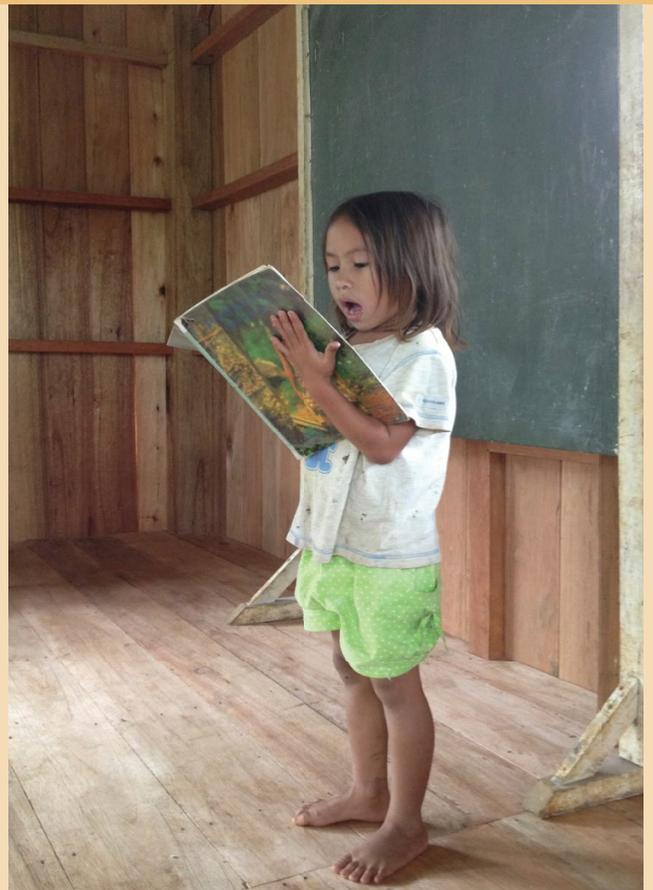




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RECONCILIATION WITH CREATION

## *A Call to Share Inner Life and Simple Lifestyle*

Globally, and maybe personally, we are at a turning point to revise the global strategy that is defined by economic growth. There is a growing call for deeper reflection and simpler lifestyle and for regaining the sense of connectedness to all life. This also accompanied by solidarity with those in need and those seeking change. What we value comes to light and the importance of belonging and forming communities of practice sustain us in our daily commitment. A simple lifestyle allows us envision a caring world and a way to go with emerging generations while the ecological coherence and mercy allow us celebrate life as it is and respond with greater action and hope.



## A TURNING POINT

Today the environment has become a turning point in our own personal lives, and with reflection, helps deepen our understanding of life, who we are, and the roles we play.

Our daily environment and the planet as a whole call us to a level of personal reflection and expression that helps us grow with humble integrity and live life meaningfully with others in a world otherwise full of contradictions. Inner life, spirituality, prayer and human spirit all find ease of expression through our simple daily choices, or lack of choice as for many in the world. If we reflect and internalize the world as experienced, this forms our attitudes and choices not simply by what we reason or demand, but by how we live, our lifestyle and sense of solidarity.

People feel the need to respond to the condition of others even if they have no immediate connection other than what it is to suffer. We are connected by integrity as persons wherever in the world and by the environment, land, seas, air, water, food and life. We are connected by the very chemistry of our bodies, the ecosystems and climates of our landscape in a real and visceral way. We are connected most immediately by our societies' political and corporate decisions, not simply through the flap of butterfly wings somewhere else in the world.

Today many are troubled by the incoherence in the struggle for human development, economic growth and the destruction of the environment. Given the extremes that globalization has allowed in the accumulation of wealth and the weakness of bodies like the United Nations, we are failing in the social reforms needed, while seeing human and environmental poverty expand. The core financial and corporate reforms are not yet within sight. While policy is the major strategic response in the last decade, there has been limited advance. Given the present major negotiations in the world, a greater depth of corporate engagement is sought everywhere especially in response to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While global strategies, media and events fill the world stage, there is need for a more basic and integral response. Our personal response and solidarity are critical in seeking acknowledgement of the contradictions of what the world says through a growing technocracy and its actual impact. The contradictions, the struggle and oftentimes failure in our lives to resolve the conflicts compounded by questions of global proportions, social and ecological, call for much deeper dialogue and revision of global strategy. Many feel the need for sharing and working for greater global commitment to change.

*So how do we draw strength and continue to act with integrity?*

## A CALL TO PRAYER AND REFLECTION

When we experience the evening sunlight, the morning fog or a typhoon, we may feel the fullness of the landscape, tangible as with a new sensitivity. It is the effect of being "suspended" in it - temperature, light, moisture, spirit, and earth connected. We may feel hugely consoled and vulnerable during such moments as with occasions of solidarity and of being loved. The depth of such beauty can be astounding and may be deeply shared in with others. When the moment is gone, we may find ourselves more at ease to move on with the mundane that has simple meaning - as one amongst many on the surface of the earth cared for and caring.

This is not an illusion of connectedness; connectivity is simply beauty. We may take photographs of the momentary yet lasting beauty, trying to hold on to it as if for times to come. Yet, it is in being held by the moment first that we experience the depth of its meaning in our lives. It is like taking photographs of our children; these are the moments when we see our life move before us and we want to cherish the occasion forever, a moment caught in the heart and there is joy and pain in its beauty. It is like the images we see today of Syrian refugees flooding across Europe with all the political and media coverage; but to hold the hand, to listen to the words of someone "arrived" is a whole other dimension of living.

Such reflection can slowly transform us, so much so that we live this sensitivity in attitude and action. It comes naturally through our being and is not simply thought out, but lived out with integrity.

The condition of our environment and our understanding of human dignity are intertwined in today's global and local concerns. Whether it is the human condition seen during typhoon Katrina in New Orleans, Nargis in Myanmar or Haiyan in the Philippines, this is deeply connected with our growing awareness of climate change and how this puts people at risk with increasingly severe weather events.

Reflection and prayer connect with solidarity. We are clearly called to get the right rhythm in our relation with creation and a way of proceeding that is integral with the way of life that cares for all, neighbour and nature.

*Now how do we understand an integral way of living?*

## SIMPLE LIFESTYLE

In this age of gadgets and high technologies, where upgrade versions of smartphones and tablets are near annual and obsolescence is built-in, we often see ourselves lured and challenged to keep up with the latest, rather than to live sustainably. Simplicity is not focused on having less material possessions but rather it is more about our attitude and how we value our self as well as others and broader society. It is from this awareness we can assess our uptake of needed technology.

A simple life has a different meaning for every person, but it is important that:

- We learn what enough is
- We know what the impact is of our daily consumer choices on regional planetary boundaries
- We work for health and happiness, recognizing we are mortal and have free choice
- We consciously consider the life of the next generations
- We feel we belong and we possess the basis of our peace

Simplicity is a process, a question of priorities, of relationships and of commitments; it is not an obsession with an ideal. First and foremost we can ask what is our identity and relation in creation. Who are we in the face of God's wisdom? Doesn't our minuteness reflect something of the simplicity we should live? From a household of one to a household of ten, there is no easy answer and the effort may not even seem worth it. Yet how do we express the way we want to live, our relationships and what is our guide as we live as family, in community and in society? What are our deepest experiences of being connected with the environment? What is our sense of commitment?

Maybe we can take a little time, quietly, to see what we draw from these questions and those of social justice today.

Perhaps we have occasion to share for a moment and to listen to what our neighbor values. Then we can look at possible external actions.

Coming from the invitation for reconciliation with creation, many are increasingly starting to be more conscious of the broader web of life – how one's decision or action affects others in the web of relations.

*How does prayer move us in practical ways to a simpler lifestyle and solidarity with suffering and degradation in the world?*

## WHAT IN THE WORLD DO WE VALUE?

How do we value the world? The ecological challenge today is one of balance and simplicity. It is the lived spiritual challenge to heal a broken world and be reconciled with creation, neighbor and God.

Environmental spirituality calls us to simplify our relationships and commitments so that they flow more easily through our daily life. It is not just about material things and the clutter we accumulate in our houses or offices but also socially in our lives.

Do we have time to marvel at and to be grateful for all life, to simply enjoy and be with others, to give praise for the beauty of life? Do we have an environmental way of proceeding and environmental spirituality that engages with the planet's boundaries? How do we sustain the youthful generation that now takes on the challenges of managing the sustainability of the land, food, forests, sky, water, biodiversity and oceans?

Society may have the freedom and the technology to move ahead, but the will to pay attention to the actual impact, to review, and to change is limited. We are constantly challenged to again witness the reality and rouse awareness when an initial development ideal fall gravely short of responding to the actual need. Social action for a moment can highlight commitment and something is achieved - not all is lost. This has happened with the energy debate and various campaigns particularly in the US, and the climate change marches in New York and Paris. Learning to mediate the expectations and differences calls for more people being involved in the process of building broad social objectives while focusing on local action.

Often the politics, business and a warped technocracy keep us from seeing with clarity the fundamentals of a problem while dealing mainly with the symptoms. The six-year drought in Syria from 2006-2011 contributed to the protests that escalated during the Arab Spring. Given the drought in California in 2015, the memory of decades is reinforced and water cannot be assumed even in the most dynamic of economies. Now the message of Africa begins to connect where major areas show increased desertification and water shortage. We are increasingly forced to see water as an integral global problem. Water use is not simply a technical fix, it requires a mind shift and lifestyle shift for all. We need greater balance and social education in the use of water and focused attention to areas of greater need as a fundamental humanitarian commitment.

It is the same for migration. There are the organized yet vulnerable overseas workers of the world, the African and Syrian migrants to Europe, and the Rohingya seeking refuge in Indonesia or Australia. We must understand what underlies this global dynamic and the responses. We have to learn to mediate the differences of needs from a deeper understand of the causes and our responses. The people and the world around us are not objects simply to be turned into economic

use. Pope Francis reminds us that the purpose of all life is not found in the human but in God (Laudato si', 83).

To bring this challenge of wholeness and inclusivity into our daily work, we need to lose the self but not the other. The demand to progress can be as stifling and divisive as it is creative. The activity and the objective we are working on can blind us at times as to the other needs of persons involved. As we go through daily activities, patience and hope can be exhausted in the effort to achieve an output while there is so much healing to seek: personal, in community, and with creation. Urgency, achievement, and the endlessness of demands of a professional life require review, reconciliation, and replenishment if stress is to be reduced and hope shared. Quietly we acknowledge the presence of so much good around and we need time to let this emerge. When we share the broader concerns with others, this can be a great relief and an experience in solidarity.

*What does it now mean for me to pray with ecological coherence and mercy?*



## PRACTICE AND COMMUNITIES

We are increasingly called to connect our lifestyle and community with our environment and the planet. Our daily life is often segmented into professional responsibility and family. In urban areas, belonging to a community of practice has increasing importance. The connection with more nourishing food, local growers and the market place is part of the process of engaging. Health programs and sports groups can expand their concerns to care for the local environment and be a point for action. Environmental house audits can be a local community action of getting the "house in order" before asking others to work with change on a greater scale. In these contexts and multiple other approaches, we can talk of communities of practice. There is much more to do in solidarity and action with people of the margins and migrants.

Japan has a tradition of agroforestry in the farming areas close to the mountains called *sato-yama*, and this has become occasion for youth to learn and take part in the local lifestyle and simplicity.

*Buen vivir* is currently used in Latin America as an alternative framework to development, focused on “good living” in a broad sense. It is based on the classical ideas of quality of life and has a specific focus on wellbeing as possible only within community. In most approaches, “community” is understood more broadly to include nature. It is rooted in the tradition of indigenous cultures, which does not have concepts of “development” and “progress.”

In Ecuador, *sumak kawsay* is fullness of life in a community, with others, and with nature. In Bolivia, the ethical and moral principles describe the values, ends, and objectives of a state of harmonious living – the good life. It is closely linked with principles of unity, equality, dignity, freedom, solidarity, and social justice.

Schools are moving towards sustainability and responding to the call for healthier and connected lifestyles, while children oftentimes teach an older generation about simple resource management and waste segregation. Education for Global Goals (SDGs) seeks to integrate key aspects of our learning. In engaging more, schools strengthen local communities and become a focus for ecological initiatives that need to be sustained in broader society. Though many are struggling to achieve a more sustainable campus, the learnings are great when we are able to continue to participate in joint action.

We need the basic context of a community to dare to envision the world by:

- Inviting others to share
- Calling for deeper listening and response
- Addressing youth insecurity and social vulnerability
- Being free from fear and seeking peace
- Healing the landscape
- Promoting values and principles that a community can live by
- Seeking greater sustainability in all our practices

The relationship can go much deeper and it is spiritual for those interested in reflecting on the purpose of their lives and God’s grace. We need to sense integrally and instinctively the life of the planet and understand a growing shift in our role as co-creators. In our homes and institutions, we are challenged to deepen our experience of community and celebrate life as good and not always looking for something better.

***How do we recognize life as worth living and celebrate with all life?***

## **WHAT WE CAN DO?**

**F**or the moment, we do act yet we remain ineffective. We pray through the experience of human suffering and loss of creation but do not connect with society. We do not have the social and landscape connectivity. We need to create anew how we want to live with the world around us and how to include all people with dignity. Our world can easily be fragmented and we do not stay connected in aspiring for a better world.

There is a global comprehension but not consensus. Pope Francis brings his personal clarity and charisma to bear on this in his unique way calling for a spirituality that inspires and “the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution.” (Laudato si’, 114).

Celebrating failure is an integrated action always able to express a culture of care while accepting the incompleteness and the sense of the “not yet.” It is not just a coping

mechanism for the losses and defeats, but is a hopeful and learning opportunity that allows for small steps to be taken in starting anew, broadened participation with possibilities for more diverse engagements, and also to rest the mind and body.

Care, compassion, and mercy must assume an active passion, not passiveness. Pope Francis outlines the approaches and actions to respond effectively to this ecological crisis, providing a very practical list of questions that need to be asked to discern if what we are doing is contributing to genuine integral development. “What will it accomplish? Why? When? Where? How? For whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how?” (Laudato si’, 185) This may well be the set of questions for the decisions we make in our daily lives.

As we reflect and come together, sharing in the resilience needed under pressure, we can move step by step with a humble joy and affirming right action and building a broader hope. Precaution, community, and civil action are growing. The Global Climate Change March in New York is made up of thousands of people who will return to communities and somehow share their experience.

The critical science and economics of things and the human spirit need to dwell together. We have to name the challenge ahead of us, or rather what we are immersed in, with dignity, care, integrity, justice and compassion. We are challenged and there is a whole new envisioning of what needs to happen as an upwelling of gratitude, simplicity and joy. It also has a tough side of greed and exploitation, and also of the need for livelihood and capability amongst the youth.

We are challenged to deepen our commitment. We struggle with “courageous actions and strategies” (Laudato si’), and need much hope as we share this with inheriting generations.

***Are we discerning as to whether or not our actions are earnestly “contribute to genuine integral development”?***

### **PEDRO WALPOLE SJ**

Coordinator for JCAP Reconciliation with Creation  
3/F Sonolux Building Ateneo University Campus 1108  
Loyola Heights Quezon City PHILIPPINES  
Telephone: +63.2.4260554  
Email: pedroecojcap@gmail.com

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