



The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – NOVEMBER 2023

From the NGO Desk

Have you been following the beautiful images from the [James Webb Telescope](#)? For nearly two years, we received stunning and remarkable images of galaxies that stretch our imagination.

As I ponder these previously unseen marvels of God's creation, I can't help but look at our own planet. I find myself growing in appreciation of all that has happened to allow life to exist on earth, yet I also am saddened by the way we as humanity continue to damage our shared home.

World leaders will come together in a few weeks when the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP) meets to discuss climate change and to reverse the trends that are harming our planet and all of God's earthly creations. The gathering occurs this year in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, [announced recently](#) that he will be in attendance. He is using his platform and his faith to unite the world to respond with urgency and accountability.

I hope to capture here, briefly and concretely, ways for us, as the Sisters of Charity Federation, to be informed, to be united in prayer, and to be in solidarity with Pope Francis and all faith-leaders and advocates.

A Brief History

In 2016, at COP 21, the [Paris Agreement](#) was signed by 195 governments as a legally binding international treaty on climate change. The Paris Agreement was a beacon of light in the multilateral climate change process, because, for the first time, a binding agreement brought all nations together to combat climate change and to adapt to its effects. Its overarching goal is to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue



NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI, Klaus Pontoppidan (STScI)

efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In recent years, world leaders, informed by scientists all around the world, have stressed the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C by the end of this century.

Sadly, we are not on track to achieve this goal, and we are trending in the wrong direction.

It is widely accepted that Pope Francis' contribution to discourse on international climate policies and sustainable development objectives inspired political cooperation leading up to the Paris Agreement. He attended COP 21 and advocated for action and change. Earlier that year, in June, he issued his familiar and groundbreaking encyclical, "[Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home](#)."

COP 28

We pray that history repeats itself. Earlier this Fall, Pope Francis issued "[Laudate Deum](#)," a follow-up



to “Laudato Si.” He is urging government leaders to re-imagine social structures and to respond with the urgency that is required. On Dec. 2–3, Pope Francis will address government and faith leaders in person, mirroring his strategy from eight years ago.

Where to Find Hope

As part of the Paris Agreement, governments were required to complete a [global stocktake](#) (GST) to assess progress in climate change. It is an inventory that seeks to identify gaps and opportunities for collaborative support. This will be a focus of COP 28 as well as the Lost and Damage fund that was an agreement from COP 27. Read more [here](#) and [here](#) about the focus and hopes for the meeting.

Our Part to Play

Virtual Participation

While I will be attending many of the sessions virtually, they are available online for all to follow. Please connect with your NGO Liaison to learn more.

Prayer

I encourage all of us to pray for the Holy Father and Government leaders, as well as all those faith advocates who are traveling to hold leadership accountable. Consider incorporating this [prayer service](#) with your communities to be in solidarity with our faith-based colleagues.

Continued Self-Assessment

As the world takes stake of their own impact on climate, we must continue to do the same. How do we adjust and improve our daily actions, lower our carbon imprint, and advocate for ecological justice? Please visit the [Laudato Si Action Platform](#) for more ideas and strategies for both you and your communities.

A Necessary Urgency

Severe weather patterns are already rearing the dangerous strength and devastation of our warming

planet. While we can fearfully wonder what this will all mean for future generations, we do not have to look far for examples of nations who are suffering now from severe storms and drought, rising sea levels and temperatures, and loss of lives.

These are the words of Pope Francis, written in “Laudato Si” and repeated in “Laudate Deum”: “To the powerful, I can only repeat this question: ‘What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?’”

Let’s pray for those in leadership for a transformative heart, and let us pray for one another as we raise our voices to local and global leaders, while at the same time, reducing our own [carbon footprint](#).

Closing Thought

Pope Francis, in Laudate Deum, best summarizes our connection to the cosmos this way: “The Judeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvelous concert of all God’s creatures,” but “as part of the universe, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (67).

May we, as humanity, accept and respond to the role we play within this remarkable mosaic that is God’s creation.

NGO Liaisons

The NGO liaisons for the Sisters of Charity Federation came together virtually last month to discuss the many effective and innovative efforts taken by our congregations to address climate change and to care for creation.

While there is always more to do, and more possibilities for collaboration exist, there was a deep sense of gratitude for the impact of this network on this justice issue.

From advocacy to grassroots efforts and projects, I was reminded of the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Dr. James Walters, EdD, represents the Sisters of Charity Federation NGO at the United Nations. Jimmy educates federation members and the public on the services and activities of the United Nations.
jwalters@sistersofcharityfederation.org