

Raising Awareness about the Common Good of the (World's) Seas

Pope Francis calls for inter-generational solidarity to address the ecological crisis

A major conference, “*The Common Good and our Common Seas*”, took place in Copenhagen from 3 – 5 May 2019. It brought together a wide and international audience from the Catholic Church, from Europe and from further afield. Representatives from the Church, science, business and civil society met to consider the challenges facing the world’s oceans, seas and coastal areas. Presentations also explored the impact of climate change and ecological damage on the livelihoods of communities and peoples who depend on the health of the seas.

In the light of Pope Francis’ encyclical letter, *Laudato Si’*, the organisers¹ addressed these subjects from a wide range of perspectives. This integrated approach included presentations on issues such as: the stress put on the oceans by pollution and over-fishing; global warming and the ensuing loss of biodiversity; sustainability programmes of the global maritime industry, including a fisherman’s account of the challenges facing the fishing communities and industry; the risks for natural habitats and living communities through sea mining activities; the potential for generating renewable energies offshore; the growing threats and hardships for seafarers, and the global phenomenon of slavery in parts of the fishing industry.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development presented and read a Message of Pope Francis to the conference participants. In his Message Pope Francis called for inter-generational justice and dialogue in order to develop more effective responses to the “the threats caused by unjust management of our seas and criminal manipulation of maritime industries”.

In a seminal speech Ambassador Peter Thomson, the first UN special envoy to the Oceans, identified five particular challenges for the oceans: pollution by fertilisers, metals, plastics and sewage; unsustainable fishing practises subsidised by \$20 billion per year; warming of the oceans and the ensuing loss of biodiversity and coral reefs, deoxygenation and acidification. He expressed his hope that this year’s global climate talks in Santiago in Chile would be an occasion to promote further protection of the oceans and thus become a “blue COP”. The European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, set out in a video message the EU ocean strategy

¹ The conference was co-organised by Justice and Peace Europe, Justice and Peace Denmark, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the “Stella Maris” Apostleship of the Seas and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development



which aims to strengthen international ocean governance, to promote a sustainable blue economy and to support research activities.

Amy Echeverria, founding Board President of the *Global Catholic Climate Movement* (GCCM), insisted in her contribution on the need to develop greater intimacy with creation, a life style of sustainability and to “cultivate our voices as advocates for the oceans”. Rev. Joe O'Donnell from the *Apostleship of the Seas* presented concrete examples of how the Church is “sailing with Seafarers” and provides concrete help and spiritual support to this international and oftentimes exploited part of humanity.

In his concluding remarks on the second day of the Conference the President of *Justice and Peace Europe*, Bishop Noel Treanor of Down and Connor (Belfast), Ireland, lauded the timeliness and wide-ranging inclusiveness of the Conference. He remarked that inspired by faith, grounded in science and enriched by contributions from research, industry, shipping, the fishing industry etc., the Conference proceedings constituted a vital contribution to promoting enhanced awareness in society and between generations as well as across all fields of human enterprise for promoting better care for the oceans and for creation in general. He stressed the importance of Pope Francis' emphasis on contemplation, specifically the prayerful contemplation of creation and the cosmos for the promotion of dialogue between faith, science and industry and between all who interact with the Seas.

On Sunday 5 May Cardinal Peter Turkson celebrated a special *Stella Maris* Mass, together with Conference participants onboard a ship off the coast of Copenhagen.

In their meeting on 5 May the General Secretaries of the Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe took the decision to dedicate the Annual Concerted Action of the Justice and Peace Europe Network in 2020 to the Common Good of the Seas.

Thus, next year, 2020, the European Network of Justice and Peace will develop a Concerted and a Common Action on the Common Good of the Seas.

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