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A NEW MISSION OF SOLIDARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

– John Guiney SJ

Today is a day of celebration and thanksgiving for the lives and work of hundreds of Irish Jesuit missionaries who have served in different continents and diverse cultures in our world. We also remember our lay partners from Ireland who were and are part of our mission in different corners of our world

It is, however, not only an occasion for giving thanks but it is a moment to ask what our relationship looks like to what we called in the old days 'mission territories'. In the words of the theme of the conference, how can we explore new pathways to being in solidarity with the global south? How do we read the signs of the times and discern together what this partnership is about? How can we be in greater solidarity?

We now recognize that mission is no longer 'from the West to the rest,' but increasingly 'from everywhere to everywhere.'

Can I suggest briefly 4 key points that should be part of this thinking and discernment.

1. Demographical shift

There has been an ecclesial demographic shift to a Global South Leadership in our Church in the past years. The centre of Christianity has shifted significantly to the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America). We now recognize that mission is no longer “from the West to the rest,” but increasingly from everywhere to everywhere.

It is significant that international Church leadership for the past 14 years and indeed Jesuit leadership has come from the global south – Latin America. Our General comes from Venezuela, the late Pope Francis from Argentina, and Pope Leo was pastorally formed in Peru. One quarter of the approximate 15,000 Jesuits come from South Asia – India and surrounding countries. The country with the highest number of Jesuit vocations is Vietnam. The dynamism and youth and spirit of the church comes from outside Europe.

In the global south the gospel is being interpreted within specific, cultural, social and political contexts. There is a focus in incarnating the Gospel in ways that resonate with local contexts and cultures. Focus on following the Gospel call in pastoral challenges is preferable to mere compliance to doctrine.

2. Integral Mission / Holistic Mission

In 1975 Paul VI wrote a keynote encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which reflected and inspired the work of so many of our missionaries and it continues to be key in understanding partnership today. Integrating evangelisation with social justice, development, and community transformation is key to this evolving partnership.

This is rooted in a theology that sees God’s mission (*missio Dei*) as encompassing the whole of human life, not just spiritual salvation – saving souls. Integral human development refers to the comprehensive and holistic growth of a person, encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social, cultural and moral aspects. It aims not just at spiritual progress or economic progress, but at the full well-being of individuals and communities, ensuring they can live in their cultures with dignity, freedom, and justice.

Key aspects of integral human development include:

- Physical well-being: Access to healthcare, nutrition, clean water, and safe living conditions.
- Education and knowledge: Promoting education to empower individuals morally, intellectually, and socially.
- Spiritual growth: Supporting religious, spiritual, or moral development.

- Social justice: Ensuring fairness, equality, and respect for human rights.
- Community participation: Encouraging active engagement in societal and civic life.
- Environmental sustainability: Caring for the environment for future generations.

The cry of the earth is also the cry of the poor. The concept underscores that true development must address all these areas simultaneously, respecting the dignity and inherent worth of every person.

3. Care of our common home

‘Care of Our Common Home’ calls us into a key partnership today. The phrase “care of our common home is a universal mission and call to action to protect our environment” that captures a powerful and timely message. It reflects the idea that protecting and nurturing the Earth is not just a responsibility for a few but a shared duty of all humanity—across cultures, religions, and nations.

The late Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, describes the Earth as our “common home” and urges everyone—individuals, communities,



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and governments—to take action against environmental degradation and climate change. His message aligns with many global ethical, spiritual, and scientific perspectives that recognize the interconnectedness of all life and the urgent need for sustainable living.

The cry of the earth is also the cry of the poor, and Martha’s input later sharing her work in JCED in Malawi shows how the people who hurt most are the people who are least responsible for the pollution of our planet. The cry of earth is indeed also the cry of the poor.

Responding to the late Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, JCED works with communities in restoring eco-systems, reforestation, small holder farmer training in climate smart agriculture and green business, producing eco-stoves and responding to natural disasters such as flash floods and cyclones which are becoming ever more prominent in Malawi.

Here’s how the concept can be broken down:

Universal Mission: Everyone, regardless of background or belief, is called to participate in the stewardship of the Earth.

Common Home: The Earth belongs to all and must be protected for current and future generations.

Call to Action: It is not just a belief or sentiment, but a *call*—a directive to engage in concrete actions toward environmental and social justice.

4. A partnership in building reconciliation and peacebuilding and healing of memories from a colonial past

Facing the past with truth and penitential memory:

Pope Francis stressed the importance of acknowledging the truth about past wrongs, including our own sins and the actions of others, to avoid repeating past mistakes. He calls this a “penitential memory,” which involves both sorrow for our own sins and a willingness to forgive.

Building bridges through dialogue and understanding:

Pope Francis emphasized the need for dialogue and listening to understand different perspectives, even those of former enemies, to find common ground and work towards the common good. We should build bridges not walls.

Forgiveness and reconciliation:

He highlights the power of forgiveness, not just as a personal virtue but also as a political necessity for healing past wounds and building a more just future.

Acting as agents of Christ’s peace:

Pope Francis encourages Christians to embody the peace of Christ through their actions, showing love and compassion to all, especially the vulnerable and marginalized.

Addressing conflict through non-violence:

He promotes non-violent solutions to conflicts and encourages prayers for peace in conflict zones, emphasizing the commitment to dialogue and negotiation.

Promoting interreligious dialogue and mutual respect:

Pope Francis recognizes the importance of interreligious dialogue and mutual respect as pathways to peace, as seen in his historic meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Cultivating fraternity and social friendship:

He urges the cultivation of a new dream of fraternity and social friendship, moving beyond mere words to create a more united and supportive society, as he articulated in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

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Acting quickly to address conflicts:

Pope Francis encourages addressing misunderstandings and anger promptly before they escalate, emphasizing reconciliation before the sun sets.

In essence, Pope Francis's vision for peace and reconciliation involves a multi-faceted approach that emphasizes truth, forgiveness, dialogue, and a commitment to the common

good, all inspired by the example of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Gospel.

All of us, North and South, East and West are called to be partners in building this peace. Let us continue to imagine new ways in building friendship, partnership and solidarity with one another in our planet because we are indeed one family - the family of God.



John K Guiney SJ and Mary Carroll, former volunteer teacher in Zambia