

From Donna B. Doucette, Executive Director: The following notes are from a presentation by Dr. Carol Zinn at the June 2016 Assembly of the AUSCP.

Dr. Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph from Philadelphia PA, has taught at all levels from pre-K through post-graduate; she has worked on educational leadership and curriculum development; consulted on international initiatives to address human rights, the environment, poverty, sustainable development, and health care; she served three years as president of the LCWR (Leadership Conference of Catholic Women), and she now serves as Senior Vice President for Mission Integration for the Plante Moran Cresa Co.

Laudato si: Caring for Our Common Home

Dr. Zinn's presentation linked the Gospel message and faithful discipleship "for the life of the world." She began with passages from Scripture and two quotes from *Laudato si* by Pope Francis:

The universe as a whole, in its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. God wills the interdependence of creation. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: The spectacle of their countless diversities and the inequalities tell us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other. – LS #86

An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with violence, exploitation, and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms. – LS #230

Zinn outlined her presentation as consisting of two parts—Gospel fidelity and discipleship fidelity—both rooted in the themes of *Laudato si*. She then paused to take a drink of water, held up the glass, and said, "Four out of five people in the world cannot do this. They have no potable water." She described other imperative needs and then warned that our "choice point is here ... the window [for addressing environmental and social justice issues] is closing fast."

Those who suffer first, most, and worst, she continued, from the decisions we fail to make and the resulting degradation of the environment are the poor—and among the poor the ones who suffer first, most, and worst are the women and children.

Every action we take as if we are lords of the universe, Dr. Zinn said, belies the actual composition of God's creation. She spoke of the huge numbers of species in the world and of how "tiny humans are" in terms of numbers. For illustration—"because the numbers are too hard to comprehend"—she divided the room into a species population. One half of the

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room, and then an additional two rows of tables (about 65% overall), she said, “You’re all insects.”

Then she segregated the remaining tables into mollusks, mosses, reptiles, and so on, with only a portion of one table representing mammals. Humans, she asked? She called up one attendee to stand on stage, then pointed to the nail of his pinky finger: “That’s us,” she said, “all 7.9 billion people.”

Life is not like a ladder, with us at the top, Dr. Zinn continued. As *Laudato si* emphasizes, **it’s a circle** of life. If we think we are a rung, the top rung of a ladder, “we need to shift our thinking. All relationships are circular.” Anyone who thinks they are at the top rung of a ladder is just fantasizing: “They are practicing the illusion of control.”

What that means in terms of a Christian’s responsibility requires a reassessment, as Pope Francis has called us to do. “If everyone lived like those of us in the developed world,” she told the audience, “we would need another five or six globes. The *world* cannot live the way *we* do. It’s not sustainable.”

Dr. Zinn then asked the audience to answer the question of what the world’s most serious human problem might be. Hunger, lack of water, and poverty were among the answers that came back. Yes, she said, poverty could be the most serious, but consider this: 7 out of 10 people in the world cannot read. So while poverty is the most serious environmental problem, the most serious human problem goes beyond just poverty.

These are the problems central to the call to discipleship in *Laudato si*. The problems stem from the “obscene accumulation of wealth ... Partnership is the only way to solve this. But power and control get in the way. Partnership is the only way forward.”

Especially needed during our times Dr. Zinn added, is “*contemplative listening*: listening only to understand another and speaking only to be understood, not to convince another of something or to change their minds, but just to be understood.”

For more on the presentations, check your emails in the coming weeks.