



ECOJESUIT: COLLABORATING THROUGH NETWORKING AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Ecojesuit: colaborando a través de las redes de contacto y las relaciones internacionales

Peter W. Walpole, SJ

Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change

Email: pedrowalpole@essc.org.ph

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6273-7573>



Autor

Unpacking the experience of Ecojesuit as a global network helps in exploring new ways of collaborating across institutions and committed individuals for better participation in global processes. Ecojesuit, a tiny voice at the fringes of the United Nations (UN) meetings on climate and sustainability, adds effort to the broader social commitment for global action. It connects with other organizations sharing goodwill, capacities and voices caring for our common home and those struggling in the local context of climate disasters. While COP28 has been a great disappointment for those seeking fossil fuel phaseout, research of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is increasingly upheld. Such participation in international relations deepens the Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) and Jesuit regional Conferences in apostolic planning. The process of growing a Jesuit network of broad collaboration takes decades; each revision involves greater participation and inclusion of present realities and meaning in life.



Abstract

Ecojesuit; UNFCCC; COP; SJES; UAPs; discernment; apostolic planning; universal good; climate justice; loss and damages; *Laudato si'*; *De Statu Societatis*.

Ecojesuit; UNFCCC; COP; SJES; UAPs; discernimiento; planificación apostólica; bienes universales; justicia climática; pérdidas y daños; Laudato si'; De Statu Societatis.



Key words

Received: 18/01/2023. Accepted: 27/02/2023



Fechas

Desentrañar la experiencia de Ecojesuit como red global nos puede ayudar a explorar nuevas vías de colaboración entre instituciones e individuos comprometidos con una mejor participación en procesos globales. Ecojesuit, una pequeña voz en los márgenes de las reuniones de las Naciones Unidas sobre clima y sostenibilidad, contribuye al esfuerzo de un compromiso social más amplio en pos de la acción global. Conecta con otras organizaciones con las que comparte buena voluntad, capacidades y voces preocupadas por la casa común y en favor de aquellos que luchan en las realidades locales del desastre climático. A pesar de que la COP28 ha sido una gran decepción para aquellos que buscan la eliminación gradual de los combustibles fósiles, las investigaciones del Panel Internacional sobre Cambio Climático (IPCC) son cada vez menos cuestionadas. La participación en las relaciones internacionales profundiza las Preferencias Apostólicas Universales y las Conferencias regionales sobre planificación apostólica de los jesuitas. El proceso de expansión de una red colaborativa jesuita tarda décadas en llevarse a cabo; cada revisión implica una mayor participación e inclusión de las realidades y significado de la vida actuales.



1. Inspiration and history

Ecojesuit, as the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN) of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES-Rome) on Ecology, promotes global cooperation, accompanies regional actions and supports local initiatives. This global vision has developed over the years from broadening social apostolate discussions including community programs, research and policy initiatives in different parts of the world. This slow growing attitude reflects an awareness and very diverse actions that need to come together for what might be seen today as seeking to overcome the increasing social and environmental vulnerabilities and crisis of the greater margins of the world.

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) known broadly for their educational institutions also work in many marginal contexts throughout the world for social upliftment and for policy development in vulnerable locations and countries. Through their educational, social and pastoral institutions, they seek to collaborate with others and give strength to broader social action. Increasingly there is the acknowledgement that the institutional involvement and collaboration could have a more universal good (serve more people) if it sought to collaborate beyond the Jesuit lead institutions seeking what could be the further contribution and collaboration of the Jesuits with others. This discussion focuses on Jesuit networking in international relations, so that collectively with many others seeking social and environmental collaboration, there could be a greater contribution to the broader thrust for change and ecological justice.

Ecojesuit discernment and collaboration in the social apostolate is growing through exchanges and participation with the educational apostolates and in pastoral contexts. Social and environmental research, while engaging with national government commitments in some counties, is seeking a greater voice in the world including international relations. This gives rise to networking in many forms, for the work now envisioned cannot be done by institutions alone. The response to the social and environmental crisis is a defuse attitude and action across societies around the world seeking collective ways of caring for the mirid of life that in turn sustains human existence. National governments are the structure through the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Chance (UNFCCC) for achieving this, and the

negotiations are understandably mired in politics and economics. Social engagement from below does contribute in making the critical shift happen.

In the General Congregation 34 of the Society of Jesus (GC34, 1995) it was recommended that regional and global networks be created. The ecological concerns were officially recognized and understood as integral to the poor and social vulnerabilities resulting in a study published by Michael Czerny SJ (1999), secretary of the Social Justice Secretariat (SJS). By GC35 (2008) the call for right relationships with God, one another and creation gave the basis for the emergence of the GIAN, one of these being an ecology network. In so doing, SJS took up this integral message and responsibility as the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES) from the time of Fernando Franco SJ. A task force was formed with the early support of Adolfo Nicolas SJ (Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 2008 to 2016), to discern a plan of action for ecological justice in all areas of the Society, resulting in the publishing of "Healing a Broken World" (*Promotio Iustitiae*, 2011).

The report included regional assessments, strategies for integrated resource management and the role of science and technology. The global tendencies gave a tough picture of reality. The faith dimension was given further expression and the links between reconciliation and justice. Ten practical recommendations were presented for all apostolic areas, along with basic household and office suggestions for changing of life and mission. A change of heart was called for and "letting our hearts be touched by its wounded reality and making a strong personal and communal commitment to healing it." Patxi Alvarez SJ and Xavier Jeyaraj SJ as subsequent secretaries of SJES have sustained this dialogue and networking while engaging the social secretaries of the different Conferences (Jerayaj, 2020, p. 139).¹

Widescale appeal only emerged with the announcement of *Laudato si'* in 2015, just before the UNFCCC Conference of Parties for the 21st occasion in Paris, known as COP21. With the Universal Apostolic Preferences (2019) launched by Fr Arturo Sosa SJ, the present Superior General, care for creation, and an integral ecology of responsibility and spirituality is now budding throughout the Society of Jesus.

Ecojesuit at the international level has kept track of and participated through its members where possible in the UNFCCC under which the COP (national governments) meet to negotiate commitments generally every year since 1994. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000-2015) committed world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. This was focused on the developing world, having open fora welcoming civil society participation. The MDGs are now superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015-2030) that are undergoing much revision since COVID-19 and seen as applicable in all countries. These goals have been a point of discussion in many continents and Jesuit institutions have been increasingly active in these efforts from the national level. The Oceans Conference and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are also UN processes that invite civil society participation and where Jesuit institutions are networking with governments as well as faith organizations.

The functioning of the initial network operated with the commitment of individuals from social apostolic institutes, a few university professors from Loyola University Chicago and later groups like Christian Life Community (CVX-CLC) shared their energies, inquiry and resources so

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¹ There are six Conferences that coordinate the different geographic regions globally.

groups could gather. José Ignacio García SJ facilitated the network for its first six years (2010-2016) achieving a broad awareness and collaboration. It was during these years that Ecojesuit set up its website and social media and was recognized as having a relevant communication platform on ecological concerns (Ecojesuit, 2013).

2. Other experiences in networking

Several other experiences have fed into working with Ecojesuit and learning to adapt to the context, circumstances and creativity, while spotting partnership possibilities. The International Panel on Climate Change had already started in 1988 and then the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, during which the UNFCCC was established several years before the first Conference of Parties (COP) met in 1995 in Berlin. During the Earth Summit, six Jesuits and related people managed to meet up, including Mauricio Lopez and José Aguilar SJ, sharing local concerns, programs and experiences coming from different contexts and points of insertion. Peter Walpole was part of a Misereor team whose concerns were focused on water and indigenous peoples. The main effort was to understand a very complex process and to see what could be learned from the broader reality.

Engagements with Misereor continued in many forms, always providing that broader collaboration and gatherings with people of diverse experience. One memorable gathering was in Würzburg, Germany (Ecojesuit, 2017), fostering this kind of global networking and was occasion for exploring further the emergence of ecclesial networking with Cardinal Pedro R. Barreto SJ and what was growing in the Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM).

These relations expanded with a meeting in Georgetown in 2019, where the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN) began. For Oceania and Asia such a large biome was considered for two main reasons. First, the weather pattern is formed in the Pacific Ocean affecting not only the people there, but also in Asia. Second, for the ease of learning together and sharing resources lessons and actions could contribute to better bridge-building between the different Bishops' Conferences (RAOEN, 2022). Other conference gatherings also help in sustaining the collaborations by pulling many of the same people together and grappling with some of the challenges, like in the Gregorian University in Rome (2022). Meetings with the Dicastery for Human Development strengthened the global Ecclesial Network Alliance (ENA) and established a working relationship by 2023 (Ecojesuit, 2023a).

Another important experience in networking from local to national and international was with the Asia Forest Network (AFN), set up in India by Mark Poffenberger in 1987. By 1992 the AFN was expanding further into Southeast Asia, looking into traditional community forest management (Poffenberger, 1994). A primary concern of the AFN was the promotion of the local communities' actual management knowledge within governmental policy (AFN, 1995). The familiarization and embedded engagement in communities over many years allowed for local stories and documentation of practices to emerge. These were the fundamental building blocks of a bottom-up approach for better management and greater inclusion of the cultures' contributions to local and national practices. The development of the "rubber sheeting" of community resource maps, to fit technical maps by stretching the former to overlap georeferenceable points that included tributary connections and road crossing, is an example of that kind of collaboration and allowed for community-designed management maps to be available to government departments (ESSC, 1998).

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The 1990s was also a period in which international organizations, such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, were seeking to work with Forestry Departments for better management of forests globally, so to avoid mass deforestation (IUCN, 1998-2001). Collaboration with local government and technical staff at national departments was considered essential in developing sound conservation programs (AFN, 1996). After 2000, the conservation network consolidated itself in Asia, growing into a collaboration of over 600 community foresters, at a time when indigenous rights and ancestral domain processes were being developed. In the region, RECOFTC emerged for a time as a regional platform for learning and engagement with governments (Apte, 2002). AFN formed an approach with many government programs across the region and gave strength to community initiatives not seen before (Poffenberger et al., 2006). The process was developed to bring professionals to the field and then bring the lessons learned back to policy discussions. This operated for many years in diverse contexts and in the Philippines, through what was known as the Philippine Working Group for Community-based Natural Resource Management.

3. Developments in growing networks in the Society

Two developments in the growth of networking are significant. First, the availability of internet tools and social media that allow for virtual gatherings and consistent communications in building a network from anywhere. The UN agencies are effective in sharing their information and data, in processing inquiries, access and applications for the multiple areas of international dialogue. Meanwhile, media and watchdog groups can also share their research and critique. Developing multiple strands of Jesuit communications and participation in these diverse meetings has been important in exploring international relationships while working more integrally within the Society of Jesus. Second, has been the strengthening of the Society of Jesus's own structures to adapt them to today's realities. The world has changed and Fr Adolfo Nicolás' response was the Society, too, must change: "St. Ignatius would be the first to speak of a change of structures, because reality has changed, because we have also changed, and because we know more and are more aware of what no longer works. The new structures will only work if we know how to collaborate and contribute" (Nicolás, 2014).

The challenge has been to understand that institutions can reach only so far, but in seeing the more universal mission there is a need for greater collaboration, giving time and resources to clear objectives that are not measured simply in terms of success rates. People still need to be rooted in their local and institutional work, while collaborating with the global objectives and enfolded into the institutional agenda. Institutions need to see there is something enriching for them in networking, always drawing them into the larger vision. Daniel Villanueva SJ noted that: "Flow (in a network) is when you have the right balance between challenges and skills. The objective has to be bold enough so that the network is not boring and does not produce reports no one reads." (Villanueva, 2023). Fr Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus between 1965-1981, sent a telegram to over 50 Provinces in 1979:

Continuing tragedy vietnamese boat people challenges to christian conscience, genuine commitment to GC32 and solidarity

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I wish you mobilize as far as possible sustained effort of provibce to influence acclesial and civil community and government, even if already generaous, for extended right of asylum and financial aid

Arrupe

Daniel Villanueva (2023) references Arrupe's words to ask when setting up a network: "For your scope of action, with your vision, what telegram would you write? What needs are we called to answer that can only be answered collaboratively?" One of the most beautiful things about the Society of Jesus is that in the novitiate every novice learns that the superior's mere wish is to be taken as a command, so when Fr Arrupe turned to the whole Society to wish for a collective mobilization there was a response and the Jesuit Refugee Network (JRS) happened. JRS is an institutional network with global reach.

Networks have emerged in a diversity of ways over time, what has been critical has been the clarity of agreed relations, objectives and mandates. Some networks have been sustainable, some have faded out, yet every time there is much to be learned from the experience. Fe y Alegria (FyA), founded in Caracas in 1955, is an early form of a long existing educational network. These early shared experiences gave opportunity for others experimenting in networking to adopt or shift in their particular context, purpose and style of operating.

For example, visiting FyA, particularly in Bolivia, was very helpful for Jesuit initiatives identifying what could be done for indigenous education in the Philippines, where there was an initial identification of over one hundred schools in Mindanao.² While the effort failed, much was learned in forming the objectives and structuring the learning process and emphasis of cultural integrity. The Jesuit Commons: Higher Education in the Margins and later collaboration with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL), helped understand how global collaboration makes education possible in circumstances otherwise unachievable (Balleis, 2016). Working with the Economic and Ecology Task Force of the International Association of Jesuit Universities was a further experience in strengthening collaboration with the Higher Educational Apostolate. All of the above experiences contributed to enrich the process of learning in Ecojesuit.

As Ecojesuit grew from a group of voluntary committed people coming from different institution closer coordination was sought. Authority over the networks and manner of accountability needed further clarification and documentation. Over time, with the appointment of Conference Presidents and of Social Secretaries, the GIANs gained acknowledgement. Formal recognition was given in 2022 through the GIAN Governance Document (2002). Fr Arturo Sosa affirmed this in his accompanying letter on 26 May stating that: "Collaboration and networking offer richness, solidarity and a challenging opportunity for our engagement in today's complex and changing socio-economic, political and religious situations" (Sosa, 2023a). The document clearly gives the mandate to these four networks and clarifies the relationships and manner of governance.

Ecojesuit coordinators are now appointed by each Conference and in turn seek to coordinate interests of Province-identified persons. The challenges to participation include how to allocate enough time—while dealing with other assignments and local social commitments—develop communication skills and share in the broader level of engagement while finding purpose in it. Essential is establishing or seeking to include commitment to care for our common home in

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² Mindanao map of indigenous learning centers and schools: <https://apupalanguwancenter.essc.org.ph/?p=4055>

aspects of the broader institutional, Provincial and Conference agendas. Without this commitment to an active participation there is limited possibility of a collaborative network beyond a newsletter. While Provinces and Conferences are establishing a foothold in caring for creation, and can be encouraged with the local and regional level engagement they are still challenged to share in the value of what can be discerned internationally; this requires a further commitment and takes time.

4. From process and structure, bringing all to prayer

This article documents a lot of process and structure experienced over the last 30 years. How can this genuinely grow and get tested in the Jesuit way of proceeding? Fundamental in this “checking” is to continue to bring all of these experiences along the way, to prayer, personal and communal as well as to the active discussion in the network.

Xavier Jeyaraj SJ highlights seven key steps in speaking of Jesuit characteristics for promoting ecological justice that are always worth reviewing at a time of updating or redesigning. They are: to establish personal friendship with the poor; to listen to the cry of the earth and creation; rigorous scientific research and analysis; to examine from personal, structural and inter-cultural perspectives; to work in collaboration with others; to share love, peace, joy and hope and to discern together and commit to live God’s mission of reconciliation (Jerayaj, 2020, pp. 140-143).

Care for the environment, for our common home, has a familiar starting point in the composition of place in the Spiritual Exercises. People have moved on from the fear of New Age and settle down anew to creation not being another dimension of mission, but the very start of the Bible and as the living “Book of Creation.” Creation was seen as an open and lived book in medieval times, not unfamiliar to St. Ignatius as he sat on the Roman rooftop at night. When considering the Trinity looking down upon the world, and then sending the Son, today the wonderful cosmic satellite images of the green, blue, sandy brown and white globe are already in everyone’s imagery and awe as a beautiful contemplation.

Similarly, composition of place, Bethlehem, where a child is born and the vulnerable reality of a family journeying is the context of so many people today. Human vulnerability and recognizing the face of Jesus in others is again occasion for a humbling and deep contemplation. During the Christmas season this need for a safe place is more easily recognized and less judged by most people. It is an occasion to contemplate within a faith context and act with compassion in the context of the poor around, from the local to the global. Understanding power in the world and not letting the peace of our heart be overtaken by this, but remaining open to share in the stories and aspirations of others is key in the leadership needed for networking.

People can experience locally the degradation and visualize our globe being damaged on a planetary scale. The “flight into Egypt” is made vivid in contemporary scenes of forced migration and wars around the world. The sense of relationship with our Creator and the coming of Christ into our midst, causes us to reimagine why and how each person is part of the discord and the need to respond to the call of the Holy Spirit. The defenselessness of the whole human family is laid bare and the need to defend human dignity before cultural and religious histories becomes evident. Similarly, the Earth is being degraded and billions of people are made marginal through techno-economic processes focused on wealth rather than wellbeing. In these contexts of both local and global, the call of reconciliation, of how people care for others and how every person is woven into the life of the planet holds the depth of meaning. This call for reconciliation can

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take the form of advocacy for change, of the need for greater processes of collaboration to build partnerships of trust and of engaging in international relations.

The GIAN networks of Ecology, Justice in Mining, Migration and Right to Quality Education (and previously one on Human Rights) are interwoven in their global realities and are not separate issues, but collectively seek to advocate an integral ecology and human dignity. GC36 helped in this with its emphasis on networking, collaboration and discernment as perspectives of the contemporary way of proceeding. Yet in the actual organizing the networks still need to develop the capacities and channels by which in the future these areas of advocacy can work more directly in support of each other. The UAPs give the Society the framework of the mission and out of this in the process of time grows the conditions of possibility.

The challenges of international relations are also very diverse and demand focus for small networks to be relevant. Advocacy network of the youth and groups like Magis and the Ignatian Solidarity Network (ISN) help create events where there is youth focus, but these have not got to a stage where actions are sustainable across networks while they can collaborate when drawn to participate in global events.

Returning to the process of advocacy, collaborations, partnerships and action at COP, this is best understood based on the experiences and learnings while participating. There are six general elements (not a step-by-step linear process) of how the networking proceeds that draw on a collaborative and communal engagement: scoping, narrative, diversity, ways of operating, planning, and communications.

5. Ecojesuit at COPS (I): scoping, narrative, and diversity

At the beginning of each year, the Ecojesuit Secretariat team sets up meetings with each of the six Conferences to listen to those involved and understand what is on their agenda for the year. Information is shared on what might be relevant in scoping of collaborative potentials. Other local works and positions are recognized while the network itself seeks to stay focused given the limited time for global action and geographical scope.

As climate change has become a conscious reality that needs a global focus, along with the interconnecting themes of disaster management, food security, indigenous rights, and now energy transitions, as well as the growth of ecclesial networks, the focus has gone to the COP process at the international level. The effort is to deepen commitment and awareness of our network partners on the complexities of the COP process, and the value of engaging in it as a vital part of our shared mission on climate justice. Following the Conference-level dialogues, five shared areas emerged and are kept in focus: a) agroecology (food and water vulnerability), b) youth engagement, c) ecclesial networking, d) policy advocacy, and e) just energy transition and divestment. These are followed through the COP process while also seeking to highlight the local stories and regional efforts. With fossil fuels are at the crux of COP discussions, divestment and just transition are gaining more attention for action and reinforce the need for a coherent South-North partnership.

Some countries may already have ongoing civil society engagements in preparation for COP and a few institutions may be following up more consistently at the national level, particularly now that Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to cut emissions are established but

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not easily checked. This may include following the G7, G20, G77 and China, the European Union, the African Union and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Policy engagement in both North America and the European Union is critical, given the lead action called for in their responsibilities to facilitate the energy transition.

Preparations for COP starts months before registration opens in July. Ecojesuit usually gathers online a team of people from the Jesuit Conferences or network partners including ISN, CVX-CLC and JRS, who are active and committed to participate in COP. People join other conversations with CIDSE and Caritas of many countries. Some organizations have UNFCCC accreditation, but many do not, so there is an effort to share the in-person and virtual access depending upon what agendas are prepared and what might be the greater focus. For COP26 in Glasgow, Ecojesuit shared slots with Jesuit Missions Britain. And for COP27, in Sharm el-Sheikh, shared slots with the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar, who were closely following key developments on agriculture and food systems.

Meanwhile, meetings with the core team (Conference appointed coordinators) are held to enable decision-making in identifying the network's focus that can be reviewed annually, yet hopefully run for at least three years. This preparation is essential for an annual core group meeting in one of the Conferences usually about mid-year. The Ecojesuit Secretariat team provides operational and coordination support.

Sharing an invitation to participate and forming the narrative for ecological justice needs sustained effort. One of the key actions of Ecojesuit in a year is to build the process of engagement in the annual COP meeting. Ecojesuit has operated for the last six year through the Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) that has observer status with the UNFCCC and give the access to Ecojesuit which does not have legal identity and cannot register. This enables Ecojesuit Secretariat and or particular team members to participate in official COP meetings for negotiations, plenaries, and side events as observers. After the core meeting discussions focused on putting together a commitment statement, organizing events and activities in the lead up to COP are explored, and what can be done on the ground for social participation and faith expression.

In the lead-up to COP, Ecojesuit with SJES on three occasions developed a commitment statement. This is an important element as it shapes our advocacy at COP drawing on local voices and concerns that are affected by global realities. It tackles the questions why Jesuits want to engage and how. A draft statement is circulated for feedback and acceptance, first to the Presidents of the Jesuit Conferences, Curia Apostolic Secretariats, then through them to Provincials and Social Secretariats, and social action centers, education institutions, and other GIANS. This helps us form a narrative where there is a broader interest to follow COP and understand what the statement means in terms of decisions in the policy context of this social and political gathering, and what is sought for the common good.

Producing the statements also helped consolidate accountability and commitment of the Conferences.³ It has focused the agenda at COP and how to network across apostolates,

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3 Some of the statements that Ecojesuit has released in past COPs: [United climate action for the common home: A statement from Ecojesuit in Bonn COP23](#); [Towards COP26: Advocating for Climate Justice, A Commitment from the Ignatian Family](#); [Ecojesuit towards COP28: Committing to a South-North climate justice advocacy](#)

Conferences, education institutions, and faith-based organizations that are committed to participate in the climate conference.

Along the way an experience in the local context threw light on the global and how collaboration flows both ways. Jörg Alt SJ has been disrupting traffic flows by joining people occupying road crossings in Bavaria for a brief period before the police come and haul them out. He has clear Province backing, but many do not see the point in such action that results more in irritation rather than reflection. He has called for global support at times, particularly from the South to highlight the excesses of a state heavily invested in the motor industry. Ecojesuit wrote a statement of support and Pedro Walpole had the opportunity to join him during one of the protests. Jörg Alt stresses the need for greater regulation given the environmental debt of the Global North and impact in the South. In September 2023, he supported a very peaceful gathering near the offices of the Bavarian Chancery and Ministry of Transport, focusing on the proposed removal of corporate accountability as required by the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act. In doing this, his statement highlighted the connection with the Global South and the call for greater vehicle regulation given the impacts of climate change.

Though most Jesuits do not join peaceful protests of this nature, there is a silent recognition that this is a sign of a healthy democracy. In recent COP events the restrictions on demonstrations have become a major outcry against the host country security systems (The Guardian, 2023). These actions question the political structures of our time and call for deeper reflection and processes for understanding participation in such engagements.

In reviewing the measure of a network, always experiencing some shifts, as was said earlier, success is in the accompaniment and the actual participation not simply the effectiveness of the advocacy. There is a *cura personalis*, the openness to a different agenda, and trying to find an easy and trusting way in the meetings, most often virtual, to follow as discernment of listening and speaking, calm enough to share a sense of this being God's will that is emerging beyond an individuals or reality.

The Provinces and Conferences already have their plans and agendas, so the alignment of network objectives is critical at each level and in the overall strategy. The team-actors generally come from institutions that are independent, but overall see the importance of cooperation and seek out collaboration to bring them beyond their area objectives. As these people identify with the network, and are not constantly changing, this allows things to work; the authority stems more from the shared commitment drawn from a sense of a collective mission. The facilitation and inspiration continues to align interests. Having drawn in the interests and objectives the challenge, then, is to understand how best to identify strategies that help cascade the actions through the network flows.

The resources are in the Provinces and Conferences, that already provide for the team members to implement the shared objectives at the appropriate levels and the effort is in part to leverage their participation at a more universal level for the greater good. If this gives a better understanding of the inner networks, then the recently shared and growing objective of participating in the COP process is more easily understood.

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6. Ecojesuit at COPs (II): ways of operating, planning and communicating

There were memorable COPs along the way with growing social commitment: the Kyoto Protocol (COP3, 1997) calling for legally binding reductions in greenhouse gas emissions 6 to 8% below 1990 figures, this is much the same call today and yet no action agreement over 25 years later. The Montreal Protocol on Ozone (COP11, 2005) that was notably successful, and the Copenhagen breakdown (COP15, 2009) that led to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as a renewed approach to give countries the freedom to commit to action.

Ecojesuit usually has two to five “observer status” in-person slots to the COP and they have “badges” that enable them to be present in many official meetings and events. This area is called the “Blue Zone.” In-person team members usually keep track of COP negotiations and key developments, and communicate this back to the network.

Then, there are virtual slots, shared by the supporting team who provide communication and coordination assistance to the in-person participants. Virtual members keep track of key developments and discussions by joining livestreamed sessions and keep track of what is happening at home.

Forming the team while working within a diversity of approaches and opportunities is critical. In COP21 in Paris, there was occasion for several Jesuits and partners to collaborate; they were fortunate to be able to stay together in the Jesuit Francis Xavier community and with the help of Xavier de Bénazé SJ engage with the other Jesuit communities and events at the CERAS institute which was very enriching (Ecojesuit, 2021).

In the lead-up to COP26, Ecojesuit organized a simple virtual pilgrimage entitled “On the Way to Change”, visiting schools and youth groups globally. Ecojesuit accompanied a group of indigenous youth in Mindanao (Philippines) in a series of dialogues on their hopes and expectations for world leaders at COP26. They also exchanged insights on the indispensable role of youth at the forefront of climate action.

Occasionally, Ecojesuit co-organizes events at COP (either official or in parallel) with its partners in an effort to highlight the faith voice. These events included: i) *Laudato si'*: Environment as Relationship, a dialogue and fair organized with Aloisuiskolleg High School in Bonn at COP23 in 2017; ii) Local and indigenous knowledge to climate action, an event at the Capacity-building Hub, was co-organized with the Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities at COP25 in Madrid in 2019. The Ecojesuit COP26 team organized a virtual parallel event at the Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Glasgow, on “Faith at the Climate Frontiers: Consequences for Oceania and Asia.”

A few weeks before a COP, the Ecojesuit Secretariat compiles a list of official COP meetings and side events that can be accessed virtually. These are identified in relation to the themes of the statement, and are shared with the COP team. Event compilations were put together for COP26 and COP27.

Communications medium refers to how our message gets communicated and where, and how key developments from COP are shared with our partners. The medium used include, but were not limited to, microsites, social media, brochures and check-in virtual meetings. COP-specific microsites have been developed to highlight faith-based stories of action, reflections, editorials, resources and materials, and engagement updates, e.g., Ecojesuit@COP23, Ecojesuit@

Ecojesuit accompanied a group of indigenous youth in Mindanao (Philippines) in a series of dialogues on their hopes and expectations for world leaders at COP26. They also exchanged insights on the indispensable role of youth at the forefront of climate action

COP26.⁴ Brochures are prepared by the Ecojesuit communications team to highlight the message in the statement and faith-based engagement. This is a way to introduce to others what Ecojesuit is about and how to connect. Hard copies were handed out by COP in-person team members and shared online. The network has check-in online meetings during the two weeks of COP; the effort is to organize at least two such meetings with the virtual team to share updates and reflections on COP developments.

Depending on the context and location of COP, Ecojesuit tends to share its badges with partners who wish to lead an engagement. In COP27, partners from JCAM were actively able to keep track of discussions on loss and damage and agroecology. In the latest COPs the number of slots for observer organizations are becoming tighter. Partners are highly encouraged through their institutions to secure accreditation with the UNFCCC or find other institutions that may have extra badges.

During COP25 the daily schedule was discussed and the various events were divided up. Some people had a keen sense of some negotiations and points to be tracked by the different parties (country negotiators), and others found great value in the social networking and advocacy around the meetings in the “Green Zone” (a more widely accessible area for the public). Individuals would agree to write articles on a particular negotiation item or social event, and the sense of joint effort is strong. This is adapted to the shifting reality than many network members come by way of other organizations and have related writing commitments.

In COP28, people got access through other agencies, organizations, government delegations or research program and therefore already had a set focus in a particular negotiation or network and had to work with those commitments. The effort is to also highlight these events, to communicate, to share insights and learnings, and to find occasions to gather. Ecojesuit team focused on sharing the daily outcomes while Rigobert Minani SJ from JCAM accompanied the Church leaders from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Vatican News, 2023). Charles Chilufya SJ was both following negotiations and working with the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa (JENA) in several events on just transition and mining, and blue (aquatic) foods for greater awareness (JENA, 2023).

Post-COP wrap-up and continuity is an opportunity to join a week later a virtual meeting with partners and collaborators to share a rundown of what was achieved and what fell short in COP, learnings, experiences, and insights on how the network has engaged helps focus and establish a further reference for a shared global advocacy in the coming year. Ecojesuit also shares a post-COP editorial or reflection. Some of these include:

- » Stepping beyond Paris with hope in a better world (2016).
- » The closing of COP26 and the Gospel of Mark (2021b).
- » Struggling to build global governance through the COP process (2022).

The depth of the engagement in COP comes out clearly in the process, as a call for greater justice, recognizing that we operate from a point of service. It is very easy to see that the fundamental discussions are about justice between nations. This in turn has led in COP28 to a clearer acknowledgement of how our faith builds our sense of service and justice. Especially,

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4 See <https://cop23.ecojesuit.com> and <https://cop26.ecojesuit.com>

as lay people and the youth join in an intergenerational call for responsibility, this has gained importance. These principles of engagement give us greater leverage and credibility in the call for action and help us come home and continue to make this work part of the one apostolic body and helps raise thoughts about the apostolic map that together can be developed.

This message, faith that does justice, is the hallmark of GC32 and in subsequent discussions Pedro Arrupe SJ (1976) continued talking of interprovincial, inter-assistance collaboration and being at the service of the universal Church. Though he did not clearly identify the importance of engaging in the secular world, in the same edition of *Studies*, Michael Schultheis (1976) discusses the strategic importance of international conferences and special sessions of the UN concerning the world economy and structures of dependence. While discussing “major arenas for future negotiations,” he commends the participation of “congressional advisors, non-government organizations and concerned citizens” in these processes and the responsibility to listen when seeking to address “the root causes of world hunger and advance peace and justice in an interdependent global community.” Nearly 50 years later, negotiations at COP are dealing with these concerns in the current context of climate change. This creation of value around participation in international processes affirms the importance of the “social cloud of concern” and action around political processes, while generating greater accountability. The need is to continue to form a more strategic vision of these challenges to foster a greater international collaborative response.

7. Ecojesuit at COPs (III): working at COP28 in Dubai

During the Ecojesuit annual meeting in the Philippines last August, the Core Team discussed the value and significance of engaging in COP28, Takeaway n. 4 (Ecojesuit, 2023b). This particular COP is met with controversy and backlash from the onset, due to its location in an oil-rich nation, and the CEO of Adnoc, one of the world’s largest offshore oil companies, being elected as the President of the gathering. While there is a need for fossil fuel companies to be involved, it is crucial that they are transparent in their participation and agendas.

Despite its complexities, it remains critical to engage, as the UNFCCC COP is an important space for the Global South to confront the Global North for its inaction. Our effort to engage is also a way to further highlight the value of the faith voice as a valid participant in UN processes, as faith organizations come together in response to the moral and humble call for justice. Pope Francis’ exhortation *Laudate Deum* affirms this and brought about greater urgency during COP28.

To spur this forward, the Ecojesuit Core Team and SJES launched the statement: “Ecojesuit towards COP28: Committing to a South-North climate justice advocacy” (Ecojesuit, 2023c) that had gathered over 100 signatures from the Presidents of the Jesuit Conferences, Curia Apostolic Secretariats, Provincials and Social Secretaries, and social action centers, education institutions, and GIANS.

The statement lays out five calls in relation to key COP28 issues and five commitment points in seeking a coherent South-North climate justice advocacy. The statement affirms our commitment to *Laudato Si’*, *Laudate Deum*, and UAP 4: care for the Common Home by engaging locally, nationally, and globally with the COP process. This also helped focused the group’s agenda at COP28 and how to more broadly network across Conferences, apostolates,

Despite its complexities, it remains critical to engage, as the UNFCCC COP is an important space for the Global South to confront the Global North for its inaction

civil society, and faith organizations. The Secretariat designed a simple brochure that serves as the invitation to join Pope Francis' call of reconciliation with the common home.⁵ Ecojesuit also launched a microsite: "Ecojesuit for Climate Justice: Faith Action towards Inclusive COPs," to share climate stories and voices from a context of faith and hope.

COP28 also marked the inauguration of the first Faith Pavilion, that serves as a space for encounter, dialogue, and action with all groups of faith in our shared ecology mission. However, there are many operational difficulties in running the pavilion including the operational costs of at least 1m. USD, with reliance on donations and grants.

It is unfortunate that observer organizations were only given two slots to access the Blue Zone, and this may be due to the increasing number of organizations securing UNFCCC accreditation. With the limited number of slots, it was difficult for Ecojesuit to build and coordinate a team at COP, unlike in previous COPs, where we formed a team, stayed together in a Jesuit residence and kept track of key negotiations and developments as a collective.

Through ESSC, Peter Walpole and Criselle Mejillano, from Ecojesuit Secretariat, participated in the two weeks of COP28. Guided by the identified themes in the COP28 statement, they had a focused agenda that identified key negotiation items to track and report. One main effort was to write daily articles on COP developments for the climate justice website that highlighted yet made accessible the technical nature of the negotiation processes. It is important to reckon with such tediousness to understand the deep struggle of over 180 country delegations in keeping focus on climate change responses. The integrity and sincerity shown by many of the negotiators in establishing an agreed policy procedure and action is noteworthy.

At COP28 there was strong presence of partners, from JCAM, particularly Charles Chilufya SJ, and Leonard Chiti SJ, the Provincial of the South Africa Province (Ecojesuit, 2023d). Ngonidzashe Edward SJ, of the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED), also made several interventions in different events (Ecojesuit, 2023e). These interventions are highly valued, as they brought forward the local realities of climate vulnerable communities in Africa, and what is faith-based accompaniment. JENA sustained its communications on key COP developments and highlighting the African voice, and our partners from the Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC) also shared daily updates on COP along with spiritual reflections.

Hosting virtual meetings with the in-person team and the virtual team during COP28 helped deepen a sense of solidarity and mission while struggling to sustain engagement. The team wrote on the two occasions of virtual meetings during the COP and once after as a basis for summarizing key developments: Ecojesuit at COP28 Sharing Experiences, Ecojesuit sharing challenges, expectations, and hopes for COP28 and beyond, and then a final wrap up text as article? (Ecojesuit, 2023f).

The lengthy and complex process of negotiations at a COP posed a genuine challenge for the small Ecojesuit delegation, highlighting the need to be more strategic in planning and collaboration in the future. Amid the disruptions, dysfunctionality, and politics that dominate the COP process, these are the tensions that we hold as we experience more deeply a sense of mission. It is not about being effective or listing what is accomplished in each COP, but a humble accompaniment and primary responsibility to hold out with hope.

JENA sustained its communications on key COP developments and highlighting the African voice

⁵ See <https://climatejustice.ecojesuit.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/COP28-Brochure-merged.pdf>

Throughout our engagement at COP, we joined a team of Catholic actors comprising of members from CIDSE, Caritas Internationalis, CYNESA, and SCIAF, among others, who are committed to keep building the faith voice and presence in future COPs. The regular meetings with the Holy See delegation led by the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Zakhia El-Kassis, are significant in highlighting local concerns in the negotiations from a faith context.

8. Emergence of Catholic actors at COP

This is just the diversity of interactions involving Jesuit related people at COP and trying to make sense of what may be of value is a challenge. There is also the need to face the seemingly contradictory, if not bizarre, gathering at COP, its ecological footprint yet to be documented. Yet there is an immediate need to also understand further the faith dimension and developments during the meeting.

After 9/11, Islam in the West was identified with terrorism. Azza Karam (2016), from the UNFPA, highlighted the dangers of such an attitude and continued to stress that faith organizations through the world had contributed greatly to the basic social services of the poor, often long before governments could. A greater appreciation of faith organizations has developed within the UN and are acknowledged to have an identity also in civil society. This is increasingly evident in past meetings with places for prayer and now a pavilion. UN Faith for Earth Coalition seeks to strengthen partnership with faith-based organization's leadership to achieve policy impact; work with greening faith-based organization's investments, operations and assets; and seek to establish an accessible knowledge-based support system using faith scripts and scientific evidence.

Being physically present in the small crowd of the faithful and to hear the words of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, and Pope Francis, and later to greet Cardinal Parolin at the actual Faith Pavilion, gave renewed strength to the moral voice and search for alternatives and transformation. If in discerning—all else being equal—the more universal is a key principle, then global networking is an increasingly sought process in finding international relations and finding the language of faith in a secular world.

As Catholic actors at COP we are all called to collaborate first with God. God continues to work with us in creation, transforming our reality into the promised kingdom. Striving for service and justice is what makes the Catholic action humble and legitimate, and it is in this cry rather than political power where the call for accountability is heard. As discussions on the final document got increased focus, a group calling itself COP28 Catholic Actors organized through social media to invite all Catholics to a gathering on the Saturday, 9th December, in one of the rooms to discuss what we can share as people of faith. It was wonderful to hear people share their experience and the interest to be together. Online meetings continue and promise renewed engagement in the coming COPs.

The call for a more explicit faith is growing, as people continue to be awakened to the daily violence and conflict all around the world. The world lives in the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, where the extent and vastness of people's daily travail, joy, exertions, hunger, hopes, exhaustion, violence and prayers is seen. For the Christian community, divided, secluded, idealistic, pious, attentive there is the great opportunity in Advent and Lent, times of preparation, of sensitivity to the joy of God, to the inner peace of God amongst us now. In these times of

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preparation, grace can be found to experience humbly this “kingdom now,” even and especially where there is much distress. From this grows a trust that whatever happens, all is not lost and that the goodness does gather, it is like the natural growth of plants silently to grow and grow, yes, they die too as life still grows.

9. Ongoing reflection on the Society of Jesus and International Relations

This reflection is the story of Ecojesuit and the collective desire to care for our environment—ecosystems, biodiversity within and climate around—that we are living in and acting on. Daily, people are generally unaware of the integral shifts happening—particularly changes in chemical and energy transactions. Nor do people act in ways that reflect how human beings belong and have our origins in this nature and creation—we are nature, created by God. Over fifty percent of the world is urbanized, a very distended and imbalanced ecosystem, the flows increasingly mechanically disrupting rather than organically exchanging. Another great percentage of humanity live by industrial agriculture (and other extractive industries), and then there are those few who on a daily basis nurture the land or live humbly from the seas. Many people still have generational memories that can bring them back to their roots; they need to use them, during holiday seasons and family events to live more simply and calmly.

It is important to trace our actions from all these local ecosystems seeking change locally, seeking to live peacefully and justly so as to take up the larger national and regional challenges. The objective is not to expect to technically solve this constructed world of problems, but to share the reality and lighten the burden, from the local to the global more modestly and better. Ecojesuit seeks to connect with our basic life and prayer, connecting the story or renewal with community and mission.

The struggle has been to not get caught just with simply informing Jesuits and Jesuit institutions, on an internal passive advocacy, but to make the advocacy real in context. There is still a challenge to cultivate a level of action within, as in divesting and reinvesting in more ecologically sustainable energy, as done with armaments and nuclear portfolios in the 1960s. High schools are achieving broader social engagements for environmental action as well as many pastoral efforts connecting with the *Laudato si'* Action Platform (LSAP) of the Dicastery and *Laudato si'* Movement (LSM). Many of our university conferences are now inclusive of local actors, indigenous representatives, youth leaders and women's groups. The very process of listening with church communities as to how and where they meet the living Christ brings communities back to care for the people, lands and life in the margins.

At the same time the effort is to form a more heterogenous group of organizations and institutions seeking a more meaningful exchange for the good of the mission. This affirmation of a greater universal vision is recognized as needing greater collaborative and collective participation and shared commitment with others. There is a need for significant reflection to understand how Ecojesuit could contribute to a deeper experience of conversion and more connected action.

Ecojesuit is an ongoing learning, of how local actions can be drawn together and form a story—a belief—that from these small actions of wellbeing, personal fulfillment and community collaboration, the greater horizon becomes a more workable reality. A further focus and need for deeper reflection and conversion is called for by Arturo Sosa SJ (2023b, p. 94): “In practically all

The struggle has been to not get caught just with simply informing Jesuits and Jesuit institutions, on an internal passive advocacy, but to make the advocacy real in context

the Provinces/Regions it is recognized that we have not found the way forward or changed our life-mission to collaborate in the care of our Common Home in a new and effective manner.” It is here where the Spirit helps us discern, so we can act with hope and seek to reconcile the human destruction of our own being as nature. Collective learning is very slow, it comes with a generation that seeks change. Not every generation seeks change as some build further on the model of the earlier generation, but then comes a generation confronted by the world itself changing. What does our network need to do of itself and with others to achieve this sense of the mission?

All these shared contexts and arising questions help us reflect on our own reality and what we might do while facing our fears. *De Statu Societatis* raises some poignant questions of insertion that we must answer in our own reflection and learn together to find the ways. “How can we reconcile the life of insertion and the standard requirements of religious, personal and community life?” This comes as a long-term call for personal and community discernment and needing to see the light coming from other shared experiences. Again, the question arises: “How far is it possible to identify with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice, which inevitably involves political structures?” (Sosa, 2023b, p. 77). This opens an area of discussion particularly in the social apostolate that has laid silent for some time and requires great vision and should no longer leave people isolated in their commitment.

Networking needs a broad base of shared local contexts and actions in seeking to understand the complementary realities of the poor and youth. Networking with groups that share a similar focus (i.e., climate justice and social vulnerability) ensures valued collaboration in shaping a universal sense of mission. This is how networking responds to the four UAPs. The heart of collaboration and reference for all collaboration is our own prayer, our listening to God and being guided by the Holy Spirit as we work with others, humbly knowing we are working with God. While we must have genuine political and technical responses the solution lies in this generation’s response that grows from the heart and involve all sides. While we must talk of the global North and South, urban and rural, consumption and waste, norms and extremes, balance and inclusion must bring us all together.

In the last six years Ecojesuit has become a “structural” reality of collaboration both because of the governance document and because Conference Presidents have “care for creation” on their agenda. It is also clear in the last few years with COP, not so evident yet with the SDGs, that this is a serious engagement in international relations and not some busybody social questioning out of its depth. Furthermore, its strength can now be recognized as an expression of universal commitment seriously contributing and underlining apostolic choice.

Beyond the temperature extremes and biodiversity loss that the Global North adeptly downplays, when discussing the immediate tipping points at risk are in the cryosphere: with the collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheets, and in Greenland, extensive thawing of permafrost, but also in the tropics with the death of coral reefs, and the collapse of one oceanic current in the North Atlantic. Our urban world, in particular, has is still silo-locked and because the tipping points are not in “my back yard,” who cares, as we will find a technical solution somehow when it becomes economically significant within a given political term of office. Bottom line that the urgency of increasing loss and damages particularly in tropical and ocean states continue while the extreme weather affects even temperate zones.

This crisis is not an endless debate about whether we will totally destruct or in the end “it-will-all-work-out” philosophy and is not measured in terms of successful outcomes but humble

Networking needs a broad base of shared local contexts and actions in seeking to understand the complementary realities of the poor and youth

accompaniment. What might be added in the basic understanding and thought process regarding a network is that Ecojesuit clearly shares a global perspective on international relations and values this; while it can be frustrating, it literally does build peace, even if there is at times subterfuge and manipulation, there is no bloodshed.

It was only confirmed in December 2023 that COP29 would be held in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan in 2024, and in 2025 it would go to Belém, in Brazil's Amazon region. For COP31, the next major heads of state gathering, Australia's bid now to co-host with the Pacific nations in 2026 is yet to be resolved. COP will have to continue to battle with misinformation and polarization, but as the next ten years move on, extreme weather events, critical change in Earth systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and with natural resource shortages viewed as the dominant risks by the World Economic Forum (2024).

We are sent to reconcile, so as we seek renewal each in our local context, may we pray to know the direction and where we are called to accompany; may we send out that telegram like Fr Arrupe to the world we know and seek together right action.

Acknowledges

The author would like to thank those who have directly engaged in the COP documentation, commented on the text or who have shared in discussions concerning networking, especially Criselle Mejillano, Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ, Sylvia Miclat and Daniel Villanueva, SJ.

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