



TRAINING REFLECTION: FEBRUARY 2018

AIC confronts the challenge of sustainable development Let us protect our “Common Home”

The theme of our 2017 Assembly of Delegates (Châtillon) was: *400 years with Saint Vincent on a journey towards the future in our Common Home*. As a result, during our discussions about the various topics, the idea of sustainable development was always at the forefront of our minds.

In light of the importance of this theme and the need to make all the volunteers who could not participate in the Assembly aware of it, the reflections of February, March and April 2018 will explore this theme. The reflections are based on the forthcoming Training Booklet prepared by the AIC International Secretariat.

1. Introduction

Until recently we have lived on this planet earth believing that its resources were infinite. Today we are aware of the fact that its resources are limited. In the words of Pope Francis, we also know that we are responsible for the earth as “**our common home**”.

Some years ago we began to hear talk about climate change, about the need to protect our planet, about the **Sustainable Development Goals** (objectives developed by the United Nations). We also listened to people speaking about the urgency to act and to live in a different manner and to do so in order to protect life on this planet.

Perhaps we have felt powerless in confronting these great challenges or perhaps we have felt that all of this is beyond our reach.

Let us now, however, ask ourselves: What can we do? What should we do? How should we change our manner of consuming and working and living? Does not change begin with some small daily gestures, small gestures that ultimately generate tremendous results?

During the AIC International Assembly (March 2017) we reflected upon and discussed this new theme of sustainable development.

As Father Mauricio Fernández (AIC International Spiritual Advisor) told us: *“In light of the fact that there are 150,000 volunteers who are involved in more than 10,000 projects, imagine their impact if each one of them committed themselves to the protection of their surroundings! The solution is in our hands and depends on the small gestures that we make to preserve life, to preserve our planet, our “common home” which has been created by God.”*

Therefore, let us unite our efforts, let us act together and respond to this call!

2. From the Encyclical *Laudato Sí*, to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals

Pope Francis was the first pope to challenge us with regard to the manner in which we protect our planet. In his encyclical, *Laudato Sí*, published in 2015, the Pope exhorts mankind to become ever more aware of the need to safeguard our “common home” (read the Training Reflections of November and December 2016).

In his encyclical, the Pope refers to integral ecology, that is, an environmental, economic and social ecology. All of those elements are bound together! *“Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature”* (*Laudato Sí*, #139). The Pope tells us that we must confront the very causes of poverty.

In the footsteps of Pope Francis, in December 2015 the United Nations published the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, objectives that are in line with the teaching of the encyclical.

Those Sustainable Development Goals constitute a new program for development (2015-2030) and a universal call to put in place measures that will end poverty, while at the same time protecting the planet and guaranteeing peace and prosperity for everyone. The development goals are as follows:



AIC is committed to five of these objectives:

Objective 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

This is, indeed, AIC’s primary goal and has been since the time of our establishment in 1617 by Vincent de Paul. We number about 150,000 and are working on four continents, actively engaged in some 10,000 projects to combat poverty.

Objective 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Since 2011 education has become a priority among our various lines of action. Among adults we are focused on literacy programs and vocational training that will allow people to obtain gainful employment. We also run specialized workshops as a means to promote on-going education. For children we support day-care centers, pre-school programs, programs that enable children to be reintegrated into the educational system; we also provide scholarships and other forms of assistance so that children can continue their studies.

Objective 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Women continue to be the victims of discrimination and violence in every part of the world. In the AIC network 70% of the beneficiaries of our work are women and their children. These women want to live a dignified life and struggle to make their dreams a reality. The education of women of all ages is an essential instrument in reducing the inequality between men and women.

Objective 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Education in the area of sustainable development and the protection of our environment are integral components of many of AIC's activities. In reality, we want to protect our "common home" and give particular attention to the protection of the environment in all the area of our work... this presents us with a new challenge!

Objective 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

AIC works as a network and this promotes the exchange of experiences, synergy, and complementary action... all of which enable us to engage in the struggle against poverty. Furthermore, twinnings between various groups help create a culture of solidarity.

Through its representatives AIC also collaborates with different international organizations, for example, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Human Rights Council, CRESCENDO. AIC also forms part of the Vincentian Family, an extensive network of more than two million people who are inspired by the charism of St. Vincent de Paul.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Share the concrete steps that you are taking to care for the planet.
2. What projects is the group considering in order to care for our "common home"?
3. Review the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and discern as a group projects that could be developed in order to attain one or more of these objectives.

Translated:
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