

## Guided meditation on solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion

Adapted by Teresa Blumenstein from her own original text for the JCoR's welcome gathering ahead of the 63<sup>rd</sup> UN Commission on Social Development (CSocD63)

(Note: Exact translations of *Laudati Si* quotations below are available in [Spanish](#) and in [French](#).)

We will be invited many times throughout the Commission to consider the themes of solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion from a fairly technical and practical perspective. What makes the exchange of ideas and perspectives in a UN forum so rich, is that each participant is welcome and encouraged to bring the gifts and insights of their own culture and experience to the table. As members of a faith-based community, some of the gifts we offer to the UN community and to the global policy conversation are the culture of our faith community, our spiritual leadership, and the wisdom gleaned through spiritual practice. To prepare ourselves to contribute to the Commission on Social Development from a position of spiritual authenticity, let us take time today to consider these themes—solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion—from a spiritual perspective...

We are familiar with the Commission's theme of solidarity as one of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Our Teaching tells us that to be in genuine solidarity is to be awake to the truth that no person or group is separate from the rest of society. As Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'*, "*Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other*". [*Laudato Si*, para. 86]

In Commission's theme of social inclusion, we hear a call to ensure that the most vulnerable members of society have access to all the most essential resources and activities of daily life. This is a secular description of our principle of "preferential option for the poor."

When we speak of the Commission's theme of "social cohesion," we are calling for all members of creation to be united in a shared purpose that bears fruit for all. We are calling for everyone to recognize that the ideal society for all of us is one in which each person and creature enjoys well-being. This theme is a call for us to rally around the Catholic Social Teaching of the "common good."

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis illuminates an important relationship between these three principles: solidarity, option for the poor, and the common good.

*"In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters."* [58]

Yet, *"Men and women of our postmodern world run the risk of rampant individualism."* [162]

*Rather than responding to feelings of insecurity that are being felt around the world with a spirit of solidarity, we have allowed our insecurity to become "a seedbed for collective selfishness." And "when people become self-centred and self-enclosed,*

*...their greed increases...*

*...It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality.*

*...A genuine sense of the common good also disappears*

*...Social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs.” [204]*

In summary, Pope Francis diagnosed self-centered attitudes and worldviews as a failure of solidarity and a root cause of social division and social exclusion. Through this lens, we can understand a lack of solidarity as a spiritual crisis and a crisis of identity. We are misguided when we try to serve our self-interest by serving our own individual person rather than serving the greater need of our whole community. A society experiencing exclusion and separation among its members is like a body whose organs have misunderstood their oneness in the body. If the heart fails to provide blood to the lungs because it concerned only with serving itself, or the lungs fail to send oxygen to the heart because it is only concerned with serving *itself*, the body will become ill and every organ will suffer together. Good health is achieved only when every organ understands itself as one part in a greater whole. The same rule applies for us as individual people or nations. To establish solidarity in our society, economy, and ecosystems, we need social, economic, and environmental policies that are oriented toward the common good. We cannot hope to establish those policies and to keep them for many generations unless we build political will to promote the common good. Such political will requires a cultural shift and maturity across all nations. Building global solidarity requires us to undergo spiritual growth.

With that in mind, I invite you all to enter into a brief meditation to reinforce our own sense of solidarity. We meditate on our identity as parts of a greater whole, so that we might invite those we meet during the Commission into the same journey of spiritual growth.

You may wish to close your eyes or to focus on the images on the screen.

**It is easy to think of yourself as one, complete and independent creature.** Picture your Self eating or working or moving through the world. In any of these activities, are you one creature acting alone? Before you answer, look inward:

*“Your body is comprised of one quadrillion cells...*

*And of your quadrillion cells, “90% are not human cells. Your body is a community, and without those other microorganisms you would perish in hours.”*

*...You, like every living creature, are a ‘little universe, formed of a host of organisms...as numerous as the stars of heaven.’”*

*(-Paul Hawken)*

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Take a deep breath and let it go. With every single breath, recognize that *you are* exchanging oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases with living beings around you.

Imagine taking a bite of food. With every bite, recognize that *you are* absorbing part of a plant or animal. As you digest, the glucose, proteins, and vitamins from their bodies will continue dissolving into your body. They will eventually become part of your muscle and other tissues. As you use those muscles to

move through the world, you will also leave behind traces of yourself, your skin and your sweat. They will be absorbed into the soil and eventually be integrated into the bodies of plants and other creatures.

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Turn your attention to the skin in which you live. We humans often imagine that the skin is an impenetrable barrier that defines the boundaries of each human person. Let us examine this supposed barrier more closely. Looking at your skin, notice the pigmentations, ravines, scars, pores, hairs and nails. This supposed boundary of yourself is perpetually in flux. It is always losing cells and generating new ones. It is always adding new creases and markings and changing in pigmentation from day to day. It is permeable, always allowing moisture, salt, and oils in and out. The skin is not the outer limit of yourself. Your individual body is an open system. It is suspended in relationship with countless other small bodies. Together, all these bodies are in service of the larger Body of creation. Your body could not *exist* any other way.

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Recall the laugh of one of your favorite people. Let that sound reverberate through you, from your cheek muscles through your shoulders and spine.

Play your favorite song in your head. Perhaps you will feel a desire to move your head or your feet to the rhythm of that song. Notice how you feel in response to these emotional expressions of others. Maybe they even alter your mood entirely. Notice their power of these recollections to drive your emotional experience. Consider how difficult it is to even imagine an emotional experience that is entirely detached from the world beyond your own body. Why is it so difficult to imagine? Because, like your body, your emotions are an open system. They are suspended in relationship with countless other creatures' emotions. Together, all these emotions are in service of a larger Body of creation. Your emotions could not *exist* any other way.

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Now, think of a favorite book or academic course you have taken, something that you would consider formative for you, something that helped to shape your worldview. The authors and teachers collected a symphony of ideas from many sources, mixed them with great care, and passed them along to you so that you could blend them into your own symphony of knowledge. When you share your own mixture of ideas with others, you too pass on these gifts of knowledge, which came from the minds of many creatures. These ideas become part of the knowledge of every person with whom you share them. then become a parcel of other selves. Consider that language itself, the basic medium through which we form and communicate ideas could never have come about without intellectual collaboration among different humans. In other words, like your body and emotions, your intellect is an open system. It is suspended in relationship with the intellects of countless other creatures. Together, all these intellects are in service of a larger Body of creation. Your intellect could not *exist* any other way.

Take a deep breath and then release it. Imagine that your physical being, your emotional being, your intellectual being have no borders. They extend beyond your body without limit. They melt into a sea of

life with the bodies, emotions, and intellects of other creatures. In this sea, we experience all pleasure and pain together; we feel all joy and sorrow together; we gain and thirst for knowledge together. We dance, we play, we struggle, and we heal as one Body. All are included. All are united. This is solidarity. This is not a dream or a vision. This is the reality of our lives even in this moment in which we see much exclusion and division. To awaken ourselves to this reality is the solidarity we need.

Let us conclude our meditation with three deep breaths, each representing a petition to God:

A breath of prayer for inclusion...

A breath of prayer for unity...

A breath of prayer for solidarity.

Amen.

With a renewed awareness of our interdependence, let us open our eyes and return to our planning for the week ahead...