



**COMISIÓN GENERAL DE ESPAÑA**

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**CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKING DAYS "RURAL ENVIRONMENT, A BET OF LIFE"  
ECHOES FROM SMALL THINGS  
Palencia, 13<sup>rd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

The General Justice and Peace Commission celebrate 50 years in 2018 and has begun to celebrate it in Palencia during its annual days from April 13 to 15. Under the slogan "rural environment, a bet of life", the conference has counted with the participation of people from the province, representatives of church organizations and members of the distinct diocesan commissions of Justice and Peace. To all of them we deeply appreciate your assistance.

The meeting began with the planting of a pomegranate tree in Dos Aguas Park and the placement of a plaque commemorating the anniversary that the city of Palencia, represented by its mayor, recognizes the work of Justice and Paz in these years. In these years, "the most disadvantaged people have always been put in the front line in their attempt to contribute to a more just and equitable society to achieve peace, which is the fruit of justice".

During the conference we listened to experts and committed to rural development. Engaging a debate with them, we have been able to contrast the diversity of the rural world facing a general impoverishment by depopulation becoming extreme in the municipalities of Castilla - Leon, and in large areas of the interior and the north. This phenomenon has been accompanied by the dismantling of many public services and small private businesses that have caused deterioration in the living conditions of many rural communities.

We question the vision that associates rural life with backwardness and urban life with progress, opportunities and modernity. We see how in many places, life in big cities can be very difficult. We live in a world in which progress is defined as economic development, causing the loss of traditional values of the rural environment such as mutual supportive community ties, attachment to the land and care of the natural environment. "The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems" (LS, 145).

It is not possible to return to the rural world as in the past decades, nor to do the same as in the city. The model of agro-industry that is imposed, with a high energy cost, dependence on external supplies and use of chemicals supposes a negative impact for the environment and hinders the maintenance of the population in rural environment that becomes more dependent and vulnerable. Public policies, such as The EU common agricultural policy does not contribute to rural development, since the aid system benefits people with large properties who live in cities.

Despite this we have also been able to verify, through its protagonists, that there are creative and innovative experiences to be able to develop in the rural environment an integral, full, and respectful life with nature, from them we must emphasize the importance of the role of women in the rural world as a catalyst for the community. We have known the case of an efficient cooperative that works in a network since the beginning of the social economy. The rural environment offers the possibility of creating a rich and diverse social fabric, the motor of participation and of society.

It is possible and necessary to promote other economic activities that allow the development of these areas, linked to the attention to people, culture, the enjoyment of nature ... living in rural areas can be rewarding that does not isolate cities and with other people to create collaboration and entrepreneurship networks. The network serves to make visible the social economy activities that are tools for the change of economic and cultural model towards the care of people, their dignity and the care of nature as a real possibility of a social economy.

We must promote the conditions for our peoples to be places to live. It is necessary that public policies guarantee basic services and infrastructures, and encourage economic development with industries that transform environmental resources in a sustainable way. On the other hand, the communities that live in the rural world deserve compensation for their work of custody and preservation of the rural environment.

The church is one of the important links that still generates community in the rural area. For this reason, we are convinced that, together with other institutions, it can develop a leading role in the revitalization of these areas. With more pragmatic proposals, such as putting land and buildings of their property at the disposal of rural development projects of a social nature oriented from the social doctrine of the church: solidarity, subsidiarity, universal destiny of the goods, common good and person centered. The pastoral care itself definitely be strengthened with the support of the Christian community. Another important aspect would be to make visible the projects and the simple alternatives of life that already exist in rural areas.

The working day ended as it had begun, around a pomegranate tree, with a contribution of land brought by different commissions from its city of origin, symbolizing negative or positive aspects of the environmental citizen and work for justice and peace from the most vulnerable people and disadvantaged.