

CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Earth Day Issue April 22, 2021

As we prepare to celebrate another Earth Day we are cheered by the flowering of spring in the northern hemisphere and by the increasing number of people receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Even while we hope we can glimpse the return of “normal life” we are painfully aware that inequities in global society that the pandemic revealed are far from being adequately addressed. The theme of Earth Day 2021 *Restore Our Earth*, as the prayer service notes, is a very Vincentian one. In recent years we have been stretched by the realization that our affective and effective charity must extend to our beleaguered planet itself. Humans, especially those made poor and marginalized,

cannot flourish on a planet in crisis. This issue of the Charity Earth Network Newsletter invites you to take an armchair *Earth Day Tour of the Federation* and marvel at the variety and depth of our sustainability efforts. Cj Willie, SC offers a reflection on cosmology and what it means to be *In Between Stories*. Our planetary crisis invites us not only to more sustainable practices but to a deep conversion of mind and heart. As in each issue, we offer some suggestions of resources and a prayer service for Earth Day. In the words of the poem of Denise Levertov in the prayer service, may this issue of the *Charity Earth Network Newsletter* be “a little grain of hope” for you.

Carol

Cj

Terry

The Charity Earth Network is an organization of sisters and associates of the Congregations of the Sisters of Charity Federation who are interested in

-reflecting on ecology/the new cosmology/sustainability from the perspective of the Vincentian/Setonian charism;

-sharing information and resources

-supporting each other in our efforts to advocate for a more sustainable Earth community.



An Earth Day Tour of the Federation

From the comfort of your armchair, let's take an Earth Day tour of the Charity Federation Congregations as, in ways large and small, we live into the vision of *Laudato Si'*: "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience," (LS #217).

On March 11, 2021, the **Antigonish Sisters of St. Martha** Justice Ministry Coordinator, Darlene O'Leary, participated in a Virtual Letter Writing Party for the *Sacred People Sacred Earth* global day of action. The event was coordinated by *For the Love of Creation*, an ecumenical coalition of faith groups in Canada mobilizing for education, reflection, action, and advocacy for climate justice. The letter writing party involved participants making personal pledges for climate action and writing letters to Members of Parliament to act on cutting GHG emissions, supporting Indigenous rights, and supporting mitigation in the Global South.

A new sign from Ducks Unlimited <https://www.ducks.org/> a Canadian organization dedicated to preserving wetlands and water, proclaims the **Sisters of St. Martha of Prince Edward Island** to be "Partners in Conservation" for their donation of wetlands in Charlottetown many years ago. The Sisters of St. Martha support *Ecojustice* which is a group of lawyers who do advocacy on various ecological issues, support many ecology groups and our indigenous people. A few issues that are current with *Ecojustice* are: protection of the Pacific salmon, clean water for indigenous communities and various Canadian wetlands

The **Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception**, New Brunswick, Canada are collaborating with local Indigenous communities, faith based and other organizations to resist the TMX and other pipelines as well as resisting plans for nuclear energy expansion. They also work on the implementation of recommendations from

Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Commission by advocating and educating for protection of sacred water.

Les Religieuses de Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur in Canada are not letting the COVID restrictions slow down their advocacy. They have been writing letters to the government against their investment in nuclear reactors and have prepared celebrations that they will celebrate in small groups for: March 22- World Water Day, March 27- Earth Hour, and April 22-International Earth Day.

The **Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy** in Charleston, SC participate in the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Salt Marsh Stewardship-From Seeds to Shoreline project which involves the planting of spartina grass on their shoreline. They also participate in the SCORE Program (South Carolina Oyster Recycling and Enhancement) which involves the placing of bags of recycled oyster shells on their shoreline. Oysters are a crucial part of the coastal ecosystem as oyster filter water, build reefs which provide habitat for fish, shrimp, crabs and other animals, and oyster reefs are natural breakwaters that absorb wave energy and protect marsh shorelines from erosion

For the **Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill**, Sister Barbara Ann Smelko planned the perfect activity for *Catholic Sisters Week* and *Sacred People, Sacred Earth Day*. Sisters at Caritas Christi gathered in the atrium to plant seeds in pots that will be cultivated indoors until it is time for outdoor planting. It was a great way to celebrate *Sacred People, Sacred Earth Day*. They can't wait to see the plants mature in boxes near the motherhouse and at the garden on the Sisters of Charity Complex.

The **Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth** Ecospirituality Group is hosting a ZOOM webinar on how to deal with “eco-anxiety” – the overwhelming feelings that often accompany a close look at the state of Earth – facilitated by Blair Nelsen, Executive Director of WATERSPIRIT, an ecological ministry in Rumson, NJ. The Congregation will gather for two prayer opportunities on Earth Day – a noon prayer at the motherhouse focusing on the motherhouse land and the native peoples who were its first human stewards. In the evening of Earth Day we will have a ZOOM prayer including a presentation on the 7-year *Laudato Si'* Plan by Sister of Charity of New York Carol De Angelo.

The **Sisters of Charity of New York** held a virtual community dialogue on water.

In small groups they reflected on symbols and images that water brings to mind; the ways we have been healed, blessed, or challenged by water; and how we see God present in the many changing forms of water. Concrete actions in favor of the integrity of water were highlighted: Bringing clean water to indigenous communities in Guatemala; advocating for the health of the land and waters of the Hudson River bioregion through collaboration with ROAR (Religious Organizations Along the River). *Charity Rising Reflected in a Laudato Si' Lent*, a series of six blurbs in FOCUS, the Sisters of Charity of New York's internal publication, offered an opportunity for Sisters, Associates and Companions to reflect on how they are living into *Laudato Si'* and Charity Rising (2019 Assembly theme and call). Prepared by the Creations Transformative Energy Committee (CTE), specific sentences in the Vowed Life section of the newly revised Constitution that connected with *Laudato Si'* quotes and themes were highlighted and offered for personal and group prayer and sharing. The

CTE Committee has prepared *A Charity Rising: Laudato Si' and Easter* series of blurbs which connects *Laudato Si'* and water, what to know and what to do!

The CTE Committee reminded the Congregation via FOCUS to reflect on and take the Metro New York Catholic Climate Movement (MNY CCM) Pledge of Commitment at the conclusion of *Laudato Si'* Anniversary Year. We hope you will join with us and others in pledging to adopt practices that help to embrace integral ecology; take Sabbath time to appreciate God's creation; reduce carbon footprint; be in solidarity with others by working for policy changes; and invite others to join in the pledge.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CVybXvAuF7Mr6SFQF4SLI2QGn5tP6OF32o4tJD0eV8k/viewform?edit_requested=true

The **Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth** Care of Creation Committee has been in the process of putting in a butterfly garden with four raised beds and butterfly bushes on campus. Consider doing the same!

<https://www.saveourmonarchs.org/> In other exciting news, half of our power usage for our campus last month came from renewable energy!

EarthConnection, a sponsored ministry of the **Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati**, has been working with the Green Tree Plastics factory in Evansville, IN by collecting plastic lids and caps from their Sisters and Associates all over the country. As of February 2021, Green Tree Plastics received enough lids and caps to make a second bench and a picnic table for *EarthConnection*.

The **Sisters of Charity of Halifax** at their recent Chapter committed themselves to deepen their commitment with and care for one another, all our brother and sisters and Mother Earth: to participate in ongoing learning, conversation and discernment of actions they will take to address the climate crisis. They are now in the process of implementation.

The **Sisters of Charity of Nazareth** are addressing climate change by increasing their investment in renewable energy and offsetting carbon emissions from air travel. Out of concern for the mass species extinction, they are improving their wildlife habitat by converting agricultural fields to native prairie, increasing the number of native plants in our landscaping, and hosting workshops on how to build butterfly gardens using native plants.

The subcommittee Care of Earth representing both provinces of the **Daughters of Charity** in the United States have been doing or attempting to do the following: They meet monthly as a subcommittee to share ideas, best practices and to promote educational advocacy for care of our Common Home to all the DC's throughout the United States. They submit articles, prayers and links focusing on Care of Earth to our weekly Monday Social Justice Advocacy news link so that their sisters can be updated and informed as to pertinent events and happenings within the world/country. They will be inviting sisters and friends to their first virtual gathering to share a video, discuss its impact on our Earth and have a meaningful dialogue to see just what else we can do to advocate for better care of Mother Earth.



*Oyster beds along the shoreline
of the Sisters of Charity of
Our Lady of Mercy*



In Between Stories, Cj Willie, SC

A cosmology articulates a story of the universe that defines for a people what is real and worthwhile, what is to be avoided and what is to be pursued. It interprets our past and guides and inspires our shaping of the future.

Passionist priest Thomas Berry wrote, “It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we are in between stories. The Old Story-the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it-sustained us for a long time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, and energized education... We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there... Today, however, our traditional story is no longer functioning properly, and we have not yet learned the New Story.”

The cosmology which sustained us for so long was a biblical cosmology flowing from the seven days of creation. We learned that on the first day God created light; on the second a vault separating the waters from the

sky; on the third dry land, seeds and vegetation; on the fourth the stars, sun and moon; on the fifth birds, fish and sea creatures; on the sixth animals, man and woman; and on the seventh day God rested - the end of creation. We know now from scientists and theologians, as well as our own experience of living in a dynamic universe, that creation is not over – that it is an ongoing event of which we are a part. In the words of Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin “We are collaborators in creation.”

The earlier story presents a static model of creation; there is no developmental dimension to this story – creation was a one-time event. There is no relatedness between the elements; each creation is separate and distinct. Earth is seen as nothing more than a resource for humans. But learning that creation is an ongoing event, of which we are an integral part, changes everything. This new understanding does not negate the earlier story, but puts it in a time and place that no longer explains our understanding of an ever-evolving universe and a God who is continually creating. In the words of scientist Charles Einstein, “There is a vast territory between what we’re trying to leave behind and where we want to go-and we don’t have any maps for that territory.” Today there is no shared understanding about how humans relate to the cosmos, and in particular to planet Earth, our home. The cosmic story arising from a literal understanding of the bible has ceased to make sense in the cultural milieu of the western world. Astrophysicist Joel Primack and cultural philosopher Nancy Abrams in their book, *The View from the Center of the Universe*, state that “Ours is probably the first major culture in human history with no shared picture of reality.”

The new story is still emerging. Scientists and theologians who stood on opposite sides of a great divide for many years are suddenly becoming aware of the need for the other. The following quotes from famous scientists illustrate this new awareness and desire for collaboration: Carl Sagan, astronomer, cosmologist, astrophysicist and astrobiologist, stated that “Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality.”

Robert Jastrow, an astronomer and planetary physicist and former director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies and Professor of Geophysics at Columbia University, wrote, "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries." American Nobel Prize physicist and co-inventor of the laser, Arthur Schawlow, stated, "It seems to me that when confronted with the marvels of life and the universe, one must ask why and not just how. The only possible answers are religious. . . . I find a need for God in the universe and in my own life."

A new cosmology is also emerging; one that seeks to recognize the contributions scientists and theologians are making to this ever-evolving universe. Scientists are continually uncovering God’s creativity at work, things which they cannot explain, but which do in fact exist. Theologians are exploring the depths of this God who never ceases to create and who invites us to be part of all creation.

The challenge for us today is to recognize, as Pope Francis tells us multiple times in *Laudato Si’*, that everything is connected. Nothing in the universe is extraneous, nothing is inconsequential. It is all connected in a tapestry God has created and continually creates. We are part of this new story which calls us to let go of a dualistic world and embrace the oneness God intends for all creation as we live into the new story.



Cj Willie, SC is a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati. She currently serves as the Program Director for EarthConnection, an environmental center in Cincinnati, Ohio and serves on the board of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light.



EarthConnection, a sponsored ecological ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, offers excellent ZOOM webinars on ecological topics every two weeks. Check out their website for topics and schedule: <https://www.scearthconnection.org/events-grid-3/>



At this link find the text of Sister of Charity of Seton Hill Sung Hae Kim's talk, *The Ecological Meaning of the Presence of God in Elizabeth Seton's Reflections and Translations* (Volume III) <https://scsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Jubilee-Talk-on-EAS-in-2018.pdf>



FAMVIN offers regular reflections on the Vincentian charism and *Laudato Si'*. <https://famvin.org/en/2020/09/27/new-series-the-vincentian-family-laudato-si/>



Environment for prayer: (a photograph of Earth from space; if possible a vase of irises)

Leader: Call to Prayer: The theme of Earth Day 2021 is a very Vincentian one: Restore Our Earth. The Vincentian tradition has always been acutely aware that the present state of things is far from God’s beautiful, original dream for creation. Our tradition is dedicated to restoring the image of God in people in whom that image had been desecrated by structures of injustice that demean and impoverish. In recent years we have become aware, as Pope Francis has said, that the poorest of the poor is Mother Earth herself. We gather on Earth Day in prayer that the energy of our charism will impel us to restore our Earth.

Reader: Opening Poem : FOR THE NEW YEAR, 1981: DENISE LEVERTOV

I have a small grain of hope—
one small crystal that gleams
clear colors out of transparency.
I need more.
I break off a fragment
to send you.
Please take
this grain of a grain of hope
so that mine won’t shrink.
Please share your fragment
so that yours will grow.
Only so, by division,
will hope increase,
like a clump of irises, which will cease to flower
unless you distribute
the clustered roots, unlikely source—
clumsy and earth-covered—
of grace.

Leader: During this 5th anniversary year of *Laudato Si’*, the Dicastery for Promotion of Integral Human Development has launched a new program and a public commitment for various institutions to begin a 7-year journey to total sustainability in the spirit of *Laudato Si’*. Let us listen and respond to the seven goals of this journey:

1. Response to the cry of the Earth: work toward carbon neutrality through greater use of clean renewable energy and reduced fossil fuel use; support efforts to protect and promote biodiversity and guarantee water access for all.

ALL: Open our ears to the anguished cries of Earth.

2. Response to the cry of the poor: defend human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, while giving special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants and children at risk of trafficking and slavery.

ALL: Open our ears to the anguished cries of those made poor.

3. Ecological economics: sustainable production, fair trade, ethical consumption and investments, investments in renewable energy, divestment from fossil fuels and limiting any economic activity harmful to the planet or people.

ALL: Make us conscious that our every purchase should give expression to our charism.

4. Adoption of simple lifestyles: reduce use of energy and resources, avoid single-use plastics, adopt a more plant-based diet, reduce meat consumption and increase use of public transportation over polluting alternatives.

ALL: May our daily decisions show our reverence for Earth.

5. Ecological education: redesign curricula around integral ecology, create ecological awareness and action, promote ecological vocation with young people and teachers.

ALL: May Earth be our teacher.

6. Ecological spirituality: recover a religious vision of God's creation, promote creation-centered liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis and prayers and encourage more time in nature.

ALL: May our every encounter with another creature be a sacred act.

7. Emphasis on community involvement and participatory action around creation care at all levels of society by promoting advocacy and grassroots campaigns.

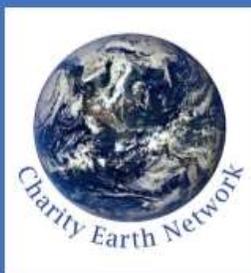
ALL: May charity compel us to effective action for the flourishing of Earth.

Reflection/Faith Sharing

Where do I hear a call in these 7 *Laudato Si'* Goals? How will I act on that call?

Ritual

Each participant in turn extends her/his hands in a gesture of healing toward the photograph of Earth and says aloud, "The charity of Christ compels me to restore our Earth."



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