

# CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



St. Vincent de Paul Edition  
September 27, 2019

Many of us might remember the bygone practice in Catholic schools of “buying pagan babies.” Classrooms competed with each other to see who could raise the most money for the missions to baptize babies in foreign lands. The Church has come a long way from this perhaps well-intentioned but now cringe-worthy practice. We now see the peoples we dismissed as “pagans” as a source of spiritual wisdom and our teachers in how to related to Earth in a sustainable way. *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, the preparatory document for the Synod on the Amazon, makes this point strongly: “Listening to indigenous peoples and to all the communities living in the Amazonia – as the first interlocutors of this Synod – is of vital importance for the universal Church...For the indigenous peoples of the Amazon Basin, the good life comes from living in communion with other people, with the world, with the creatures of their environment, and with the Creator. Indigenous peoples, in fact, live within the home that God created and gave them as a gift: the Earth. Their diverse spiritualities and beliefs

motivate them to live in communion with the soil, water, trees, animals, and with day and night.” In this spirit, CEN invited Sister of Charity of New York, Rosenda Casteñeda González, to share a reflection on the ecospirituality of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. To remind us that our Federation is international and multi-lingual, we publish the article in Spanish with an English translation. We also share an excerpt of an interview with Rejane Cytacki, a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, KS and the Executive Director of the Eco-Justice Center in Racine, WI that was originally published online at *The Jesuit Post*. The work of a Charity, at a Dominican center, publicized by the Jesuits – truly the work of religious for a more sustainable future must be, and is, widely collaborative. As with every issue, we provide a prayer service that invites us to see anew our Charity spirituality through an ecological lens. May Vincent de Paul guide us to allow the beauty of creatures to lead us to contemplative awe and efficacious charity.

Carol

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**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.**

## **Espiritualidad de la Tierra de los Pueblos Indígenas de Guatemala**

Nosotros somos parte de la sagrada Madre Tierra y ella es parte nuestra. Somos una partícula del macrocosmos, del que nosotros somos un microcosmos. Nuestra visión basada desde nuestros ancestros, y todavía presente en nuestros pueblos originarios como indígenas, vemos la Tierra como algo vivo que produce todas las formas de vida. Nosotros somos parte de ella y nos sentimos, junto con todos los demás seres, también engendrados por ella, no estamos encima de ella como quien domina, sino en medio de ella como quien convive. Nos sentimos unidos a la energía de las aguas, de las montañas, de las flores, del fuego sagrado, de los vientos, del abuelo sol, de la abuela luna y las estrellas. Todos son interdependientes y están conectados entre sí. Somos miembros de este gran todo vivo y orgánico que es la Madre Tierra. Somos hijos e hijas del cosmos; por lo tanto no existe la dicotomía ser humano-naturaleza. Somos naturaleza, somos vida.

En estas nuevas condiciones emergentes, es necesario reconstituir nuestra identidad es volver a los principios y valores básicos, no humanos, sino de la vida, de la naturaleza. Volver a nuestra sabiduría, a nuestros ancestros, al camino sagrado, que la caridad se eleva.

Nunca debemos olvidar esta verdad: somos Tierra. Las abuelas y los abuelos aseveran: que somos polvo, somos tierra nada más” Tenemos el mismo destino que la Tierra. Pero hemos recibido del Ajaw (Dios) una misión que consiste en cuidar y guardar el jardín del Edén, la Tierra. Es nuestra dimensión ética, que sólo nosotros tenemos. La tierra no nos ha engendrado sólo a nosotros, los seres humanos; sino a todos los seres vivos que son, verdaderamente, hermanas y hermanos nuestros.

Somos pasajeros, transitorios, sucesivos y cambiantes en el cosmos y sobre la faz de la Madre Tierra. Somos hilos diferentes de un mismo tejido de la unidad natural y cósmica, que existe por la diversidad de sus elementos, que tienen un valor y una razón de existir.

Oremos con nuestros abuelos y abuelas, que la caridad se sigue elevando: “¡Oh tú, hermosura del día! ¡Tú Huracán; tú Corazón del cielo y de la Tierra! ¡Creador y Formador! ¡Tú dador de la riqueza, tu dador de las hijas y de los hijos!.. Que no encuentre desgracia ni infortunio, que no se introduzca el engañador ni detrás ni delante de ellos. Que no caigan, que no sean heridos. Que no caigan en la bajada ni en la subida del camino. Que no encuentren obstáculo ni detrás ni delante de ellos, ni cosa que los golpee... que sea buena la existencia de los que te dan el sustento y el alimento en tu boca, en tu presencia...” (Popol Wuj).

Hna. Rosenda Magdalena Castañeda González, SCNY

Soy guatemalteca, maya Q’anjob’al. Resido en Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala. Mi trabajo es acompañar a señoritas en su discernimiento vocacional. Soy Administradora de una de nuestras clínicas y formo parte de la Comisión Vocacional a nivel de la Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala.

### **The Spirituality of the Earth of the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala Sister Rosenda Magdalena Castañeda de González, Sister of Charity of New York**

We are part of the sacred Mother Earth and she is part of us. We are a small part of the macrocosmos just as we ourselves are a microcosmos. Our vision is based on our ancestors, and still present in our indigenous peoples; we see Earth as something alive which produces all the other forms of life. We are part of her, as we feel ourselves, along with all other beings, as begotten of her. We are not above her as those who dominate but we are within her as those who share her life. We feel ourselves united with the energies of the waters, of the mountains, of the flowers, of the sacred fire, of the winds, of Grandfather Sun, and Grandmother Moon, and the stars. Everything is interdependent and mutually interconnected. We are members of this great living and organic wholeness that is our Mother Earth. We are daughters and sons of the cosmos; therefore no dichotomy exists between humans and nature. We are nature, we are life.

In the emerging situations in which we find ourselves, it’s necessary to rebuild our identity by returning to basic principles and values; not human ones but those of life, of nature. To return to our wisdom, to our ancestors, to the sacred path, that charity might arise.

We must never forget this truth: we are Earth. As our grandfathers and grandmothers asserted; “we are dust; we are earth, nothing more.” We have the same destiny as Earth. But we have received from the Ajaw (God) a mission-to care for and protect the garden of Eden, the Earth. This is our ethical dimension which we alone have. Earth has begotten not only us, human beings, but also all living things who are truly our brothers and sisters.

We are travelers in the cosmos and on the face of Mother Earth, impermanent, changing, one generation following on another. We are different threads of the one tapestry of the natural and cosmic unity, which exists by the diversity of its elements and which has a value and reason to exist.

Let us pray with our grandfathers and grandmothers, that charity will continue to arise: “Oh you, beauty of the day! You Hurricane; you heart of heaven and earth! Creator and Teacher! You Giver of Richness, You Giver of sons and daughters! May they never meet disgrace or misfortune, may the Deceiver never gain access neither behind them nor ahead of them. May they never fall or be wounded. May they never fall off the path, neither ascending or descending. May they meet no obstacle, neither behind nor before them, nor anything that might strike them. Grant a good life to those who give you sustenance and put food in your mouth, in your presence.” (Popol Wuj)

(The *Popol Vuh*, which has been translated as Book of the Council, Book of the Community, Book of the People, and The Sacred Book, is the creation account of the Quiché Mayan people. It contains stories of the cosmologies, origins, traditions, and spiritual history of the Mayan people. It is considered by many Mayans as their equivalent to the Christian Bible and is held in deep reverence by them.)

Sister Rosenda Magdalena Casteñada de González is a Maya Q’anjob’al from Guatemala and a Sister of Charity of New York. She ministers as a clinic administrator and in vocational discernment and serves on the Vocations Commission of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala. She lives in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala.



*The final profession of Sister Rosenda (third from the left) in 2017 incorporated rituals from indigenous Mayan spirituality.*



*As a part of The Jesuit Post's effort to highlight the voices of women in the Church, we recently spoke with Sister Rejane Cytacki. Sr. Rejane is a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, KS and the Executive Director of the Eco-Justice Center in Racine, WI. She spoke to us about eco-justice, her vocation, and the future of religious life.*

**Could you tell us a bit about your community?**

I am a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth and have been a part of that community for 13 years. I professed my perpetual vows in 2013. We are about 200 women. We were founded by Mother Xavier Ross in 1858, and we trace our roots to St. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac.

**And you're currently working at an Eco-Justice Center. What does this ministry include?**

The Center is a sponsored ministry of the Racine Dominicans and we are modeled off of the White Violet Eco-Justice Center. Our mission is environmental education centered around the values of community, contemplation, creativity, and cultivation. We have 15 acres and are a small working farm with 8 types of animals and lots of garden space for vegetables and flowers. We have renewable energy: solar, wind, and geothermal and are 50 percent off the grid. We offer a variety of field trips, summer camps, and a high school Farm Corps program to teach students how to grow, plant, harvest, cook, and sell at market fresh produce. We are two miles south of a coal plant, and there have been issues in the neighborhood with coal dust and health problems. So we have also been active with Clean Power Coalition in Southeast Wisconsin, pushing for renewable energy.

**How has your passion for the earth and eco-justice been connected with your vocation as a Catholic Sister?**

After college, I did a year of volunteer work with the Passionist priests and brothers. I also spent time with the Passionist nuns in Clark Summit, PA. I was 22 and spent a summer working in their organic garden with Sr. Gail Worcelo. I fell in love with that context of introducing people to the earth and creation. I found that you can have spiritual and contemplative connections toward it. Sister Gail is also one of the founding sisters for the

Sisters of Earth, a group, mainly of Catholic sisters, who do eco-justice work and founded the Green Mountain Monastery.

At the time, I wasn't actively looking at religious life. But when I was there, I asked myself if I could be a sister. It was clear that monastic life was not for me, I was too young, and I hadn't dated enough. So, I moved back home to volunteer with a Catholic Worker for two years.

The Sisters of Charity had a strong presence at the Catholic Worker. I joined an intentional living community with other lay women the sisters to share prayer and community. I was attracted by their vitality, joy and work with the poor. After a few years, I said yes to becoming a sister. After I entered, I continued to teach but also did a lot of work with school gardens. My community eventually asked me to do a Master's degree in Earth Literacy.

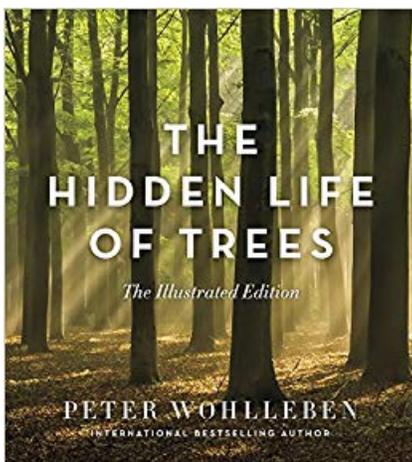
### **What is the role of contemplation in eco-justice work?**

We have a hermitage on our property. It is a very simple one room cabin. And we have a wooded part of property that includes a labyrinth. We use the labyrinth a lot for programming, for field trips and for summer camps. When Catholic groups come, we talk about forms of prayer. For non-religious groups, we talk about contemplation. We try to help people reflect on their life. We give a space for students to be quiet and listen. A seventh grader once told me after she went through the labyrinth, "I think that's the first time I've ever heard myself think."

Contemplation is one of our core values and it cuts across any faith tradition. It is necessary in our world. We have all this technology to keep us connected and yet people of all ages are feeling more disconnected than ever. We can just look at the suicide rates to see that as evidence. Technology is not meeting our inner needs or even our social needs. We need to take time for quiet, to hear ourselves think. We need time to reflect on where we are going and where we have been. All of this will help us gain insight, self-knowledge, and help us understand other people better and where they are coming from.

### **Finally, what are some tips for those trying to live with greater intention in their care for creation?**

Start small. It has to go beyond recycling. Start with using cloth bags, bringing your own Tupperware to restaurants for your leftovers, refusing plastic straws at restaurants. Bring your own silverware, plates, and water bottles to potlucks to keep plastic ware, paper plates and plastic bottles out of landfills. Then start reading articles online or find a book list to help get you thinking about our relationship to rest of earth. A great book right now is *The Hidden Life of Trees*.



At this link, find a video interview with Peter Wohlleben, author of *The Hidden Life of Trees*, the book that Sr. Rejane references.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/12/peter-wohlleben-man-who-believes-trees-talk-to-each-other>



Leader: As we gather to pray on the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, we pause to breathe deeply, to become more conscious of the presence of God within us...among us...in the cosmos.

Reading 1: From *Laudato Si'* # 233:

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things.

Reading 2: "One day when he was in bed ill, Vincent remembered St. Francis de Sales and exclaimed aloud, 'My God, how good you must be since Francis de Sales, your creature, is so good and kind.'" (José Román, CM, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, p. 153)

Leader: Pope Francis invites us to find the "mystical meaning" in everything that exists. Vincent was filled with awe at the divine goodness reflected in his friend Francis de Sales. I invite you to pause for some silent reflection. What in the natural world has inspired you with awe? What has it taught you about the Holy Giver of Life?

*If this prayer is done in a group, people can now share their experiences;  
if done alone, some time might be spent journaling on the questions.*

Leader: Let's pray together the closing prayer for unity by Vincent, seen and adapted through a cosmic lens.

O Divine Goodness, unite the hearts of all the members of the little Company of Charity in that great love that holds together galaxies and atoms and all things. Help us to support one another, interdependent members of the Earth community. When we are strong, grant us joy in giving; when weak, gratitude in receiving. Help us each play our part in the Great Work, the flourishing of the Earth community. May we be held together in shared delight, savoring the fragrance of such Charity. Amen.