

CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Earth Day, April 22, 2017

Welcome to the Earth Day issue of the *Charity Earth Network Newsletter*. In this issue, Sister Shelia Brosnan, Sister of Charity of New York, shares a reflection on Earth and Eucharist that began as a homily for a Congregation celebration. As we thank Shelia for her beautiful reflection, we also congratulate the Sisters of Charity of New York as they celebrate their 200th anniversary. Check out the website of Sisterhill Farm, their Community Supported Agriculture Farm in Stanfordville, NY <https://www.sistershillfarm.org/> - one of the many ways in which the Company of Charity is embracing the community of Earth. Cj Willie (SC Cincinnati) gives a report on the first conference call of a new Federation venture - a *Laudato Si'* Committee. Terry Moran (SC -Saint Elizabeth)

Carol

shares a report on "The Small Plot," a ministry of the Congregation de Notre Dame Sisters in Canada and wonders if there is room for a small plot in the Company of Charity. As in every issue, we include a prayer service. Terry Moran provides an Earth Day prayer service that celebrates the 400th anniversary of Earth having birthed the Vincentian charism. Reading the news these days, one can lose hope in effectively confronting the challenge of ecological devastation. It's important to renew our hope in the many positive steps that are being taken all over the world, and especially in the Company of Charity. As Pope Francis reminds us in the final words of *Laudato Si'* "Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope."

Cj

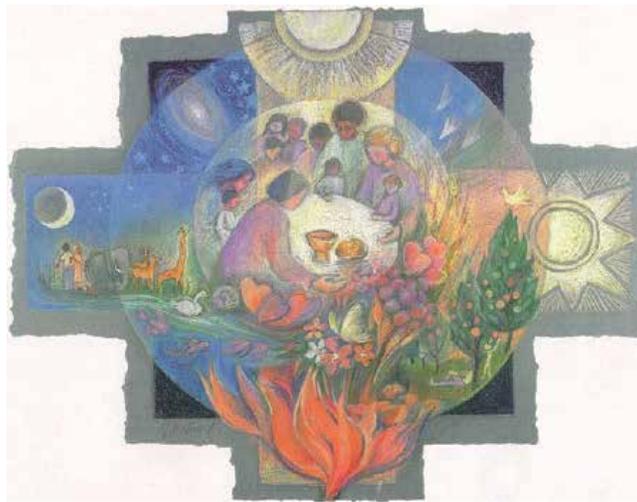
Terry

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.



Sacred Community, Mary Southard, CSJ

Eucharist: The Give and the Take

Shelia Brosnan, SC (NY)

As a very young child, my favorite place was a bench under a small honeysuckle arbor, where I could smell the sweetness, feel the warm sun on my face, and gaze at the puffy white clouds in the blue sky. Occasionally, a kitten would cozy up to me, looking for some sign of affection. In these moments of sheer contentment, I felt that God was very close to me. I had the sense that all was right with the world and that it would always be thus. Invariably, the spell would be broken when a loud shriek from one of my little brothers pierced the quiet and alerted me to the need to break up a squabble and start to play with my younger siblings. During our growing up years we all came to enjoy the woods, the beach, ice skating ponds, and a nearby dairy farm.

With time and experience, I have developed a sustained awareness of God's presence not only in nature, but in all aspects of human life and community as well. In Eucharist, I gradually came to realize that all of life is kneaded together and consecrated in God's love. How significant it is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the name of his birthplace is translated as, "House of Bread". In his last discourse, Jesus left this world telling us to be bread for one another, wine poured out in loving service. In this way, all the dreams, ideas, aspirations and disappointments of the human person come together and are consecrated in Eucharist.

Some years ago, thousands of Guatemalan Indians walked for hours to mourn their murdered priest, Stanley Rother and to share their lament in the breaking of the bread. At least fifteen Indian languages were represented. At the end of Mass, the crowd began keening in unison, that is, they began to join together in a type of sorrowful moan. As the

casket left the Church, the pained groanings of the crowd reached a crescendo. Gradually, the crowds dispersed onto a sports field. Out came little bundles of tortillas, hard boiled eggs, and jugs of black coffee, to be shared. The Eucharistic meal was complete.

To participate in Eucharist is to live inside God's imagination. Isaiah describes the hand of Yahweh resting on the highest mountain. I have the image of the giant Jack in the Beanstalk leaping over villages and seas, and when his travels are done, happily leaning back to rest and to gaze at the world from atop the highest mountain. Joy and satisfaction are integral to Eucharist.

It is Eucharist, the bread of life, that has the power to break down walls and barriers. It is Eucharist that makes the language of love coherent in all languages. It is Eucharist that maintains connectedness with the Communion of Saints, as well as in a special way with all the children of the world who are born into starvation. Pedro Arrupe, SJ has stated that the greatest threat to Eucharist is moral numbness. "If there is hunger anywhere in the world, the celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete"

We know that all of creation is being transformed in the light of Christ and by the spirit of God. Eucharist, the Bread of life, is the outreach, the bonding, the reconciliation, and the transformative energy in this process. Hence, like all grace, Eucharist is both a gift and a task for each one of us. It satisfies the deepest hunger and longing and belonging of our hearts. In the words of St. Teresa, "Christ has no body but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which

he is to go about doing good. You are the hands with which he is to bless us now.”

When all comes to light, we will be like God, for we will see God as God truly is. We will see ourselves and others as we truly are. Meanwhile, many are hungry, so let us dream of a world where all are nourished. Let us continue to seek new and creative ways to share Eucharist and feed the hungry.



Sheila Brosnan SC, a Sister of Charity of New York has ministered as an educator, nurse, Latin American missionary, pastoral associate, health care administrator, and currently serves in Congregation Leadership.



THE FEDERATION LAUDATO SI' COMMITTEE

The Sisters of Charity Federation Board has established a *Laudato Si'* Committee for the Federation. This is the Committee's mandate: "The Board seeks an inter-congregational planners group to promote study and on-line conversation to deepen our commitments to *Laudato Si'*. They invite the participation of congregational justice, peace, and integrity of creation personnel and those who participate on the justice rep phone calls with the Vincentian family. The planners will choose topics and coordinate calls among sisters and associates. A sub-committee will collect data on current carbon footprints at our facilities and promote assessment of carbon footprints in places where they are not yet determined." Sister Caroljean Willie, SC (Cincinnati) agreed to be the convener for the committee and Debbie Webber (Cincinnati) is the liaison with the Federation Board. Cj here gives a report on the first meeting of the *Laudato Si'* Group:

On its first conference call the SC Federation *Laudato Si'* (LS) Committee members (Sr. Carol De Angelo, SC-NY, Sr. Melissa Gibilaro, SCH, Sr. Maureen Houlihan, DC, Sr. Cecilia Hudec, SCH, Fr. Terry Moran, SC-NJ, Debbie Weber, SC-C and S. Cj Willie, SC-C) shared what each represented congregation has done to date with LS. Input included presentations,

social media posts, prayer services, reflection groups, a public statement, a LS Lenten calendar, bulletin quotes with action steps to be taken, greater use of solar power and geothermal energy and a carbon footprint checklist.

The group then discussed what next steps might be taken to help congregations deepen their understanding of LS, especially from the perspective of the Vincentian-Setonian charism. Resources suggested for the next steps included studying Sister Sung-Hae Kim's (SC-SH) writings on The Ecological Spirituality of Elizabeth Ann Seton as well as the newsletter put out by the Charity Earth Network.

The third point on the agenda was exploring how we might engage members across the Federation to promote study and online conversation to deepen our commitments to LS. One suggestion was to adopt a program the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus use which is to read one chapter of LS per month and hold a conference call of small groups each month ending with an action. This will be explored further.

The last item on the agenda was to discuss the feasibility of collecting data on carbon footprints. Sr. Cecilia offered to share a carbon footprint checklist

which the Halifax Charities used. The group felt that more information was needed from leadership since this would involve a lot of time, as well as human, financial and technical resources.

The committee plans to hold another conference call after the Federation leadership meeting at which time we hope some of our questions will be answered.



Sister Caroljean (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*.

Is There Space for A Small Plot in the Company of Charity?

The Congregation of Notre Dame (CND) in 2011 opened a new mission in Three Brooks, Nova Scotia, Canada not far from the town of Pictou where the CNDs have had an educational presence since 1880. It's called "The Small Plot" using a term of their founder Marguerite Bourgeoys who called their Congregation "a small plot in the garden of the Church." Responding to a chapter call to protect our planet and to explore new circles of relationship, three CND sisters opened a community on 12 acres of land – more than half of which is Acadian forest and a vernal pond. The vision of The Small Plot includes contemplation: cultivating an awareness and deep respect for the inner realities of all parts of creation; working the land: learning of its rich abundance and what it needs to thrive; education: learning the ways of sustainable living in their bioregion; environmental advocacy: collaborating and acting with local and environmental groups who share out compassion for the land in its diverse communities of life. Now in its sixth year, The Small Plot has flourished abundantly – the sisters worked the soil, forged relationships with local ecumenical and environmental groups; hosted a weekly contemplative meditation circle, and offered hospitality to college students and other groups.

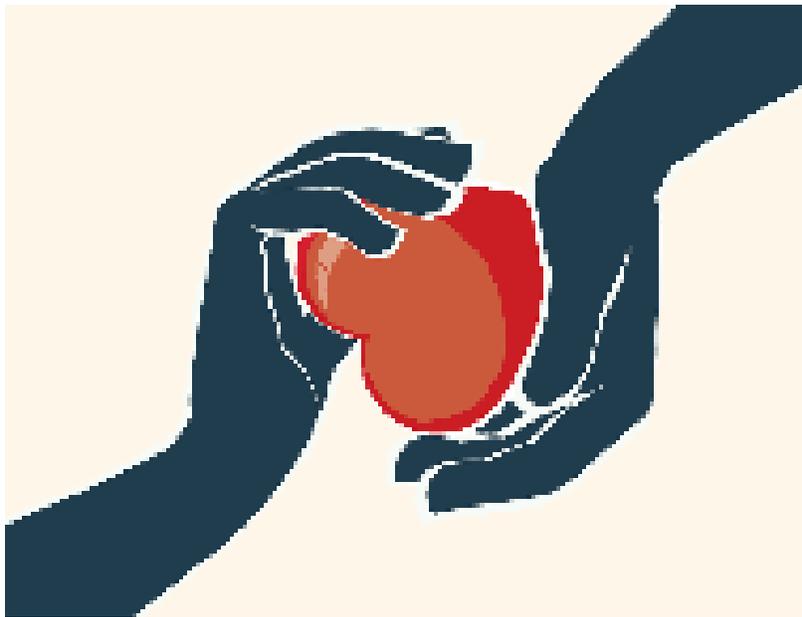


Is there space for "a small plot" in the Company of Charity? Wouldn't this be a wonderful Federation project to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Vincentian charism?

Vincent always pointed to two experiences in the year 1617 that were formative of the Vincentian charism – the first hearing the confession of a dying peasant who poured out the brokenness of his life to Vincent. The second was the poverty of the people of his parish in Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne and the willingness of the local women to organize themselves into the Confraternity of Charity to meet the needs of the poor in a systematic and effective way. What would it mean for the Federation in 2017 to listen to Earth pouring out the story of its brokenness – climate change, ocean acidification, species loss? Would it mean to engage in Earth care in a systematic and effective way. By some measures, there are 2.5 million people in the world-wide Vincentian family. Are there a few who would be willing to come together, to tend a plot of land, to model sustainable living, to receive the charity of Christ from Earth and to return it to Earth?

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Father Terrence Moran is the Director of the Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, NJ.



Let the hand be conformed to the heart.

EARTH DAY 2017

Call to Prayer: The theme of Earth Day 2017's is Environmental & Climate Literacy.

Education is the foundation for progress. We need to build a global citizenry fluent in the concepts of climate change and aware of its unprecedented threat to our planet. We need to empower everyone with the knowledge to inspire action in defense of environmental protection.

Vincent de Paul exhorts us, "Let the hand be conformed to the heart." The Vincentian tradition reminds us that education, like charity, should be affective and effective. It should stir the mind and heart and energize the hands and feet. As the Company of Charity celebrates Earth Day in the year in which we commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism, we recommit ourselves to embrace Earth with efficacious compassion even as we are embraced by Earth's lavish generosity.

Opening Song: *We are the Earth*, Words: Kenneth Patton; Melody: *A Mighty Fortress*

We are the earth
up-right and proud;
in us the earth is knowing.
Its winds are music
in our mouths,
in us its rivers flowing.
The sun is our hearthfire;
warm with the earth's desire,
and with its purpose strong,
we sing earth's pilgrim song,
in us the earth is growing.

We lift our voices,
fill the skies
with our exultant singing.
We dedicate our minds and hearts
to order, beauty bringing.
Our labor is our strength,
our love will win at length;
our minds will find the ways
to live in peace and praise.
Our day is just beginning



EDUCATION OF THE HEART...

Reader: Vincent de Paul was a peasant and grew up living close to the cycles of nature. He looked after sheep, cows, and pigs – perched high on his stilts above the muddy, swampy land. It’s no wonder that his conferences, like the parables of Jesus, are full of agricultural images – the growing power of the sun, the sowing of seed and the pruning of grapes, the cycles of growth, decay, and rebirth. He told the first Daughters of Charity, “Prayer made walking through the fields on the way to visit the sick is a very good prayer.” Close your eyes and imagine the first Daughters praying their way through the fields, the stalks of millet brushing against their skirts, their cornettes shading them from the rays of the sun, the fresh air filling their lungs. What do you think their prayer was like? Now imagine yourself in your favorite place in nature. What feelings arise in you as you imagine yourself in this place. What has your presence to this place taught you about God, about Earth, about yourself? How would you describe your feelings for this place? What are you willing to do to foster the integrity and beauty of this holy place?

If this prayer is done alone you might journal for a few minutes about your experience; if in a group, share for a few minutes what the prayer experience was like for you.



EDUCATION OF THE HANDS...

Reader: From the encyclical letter of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* (211,212)

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity. We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.

Imagine yourself seated on Mother Seton’s rock in Emmitsburg, the place where by tradition she gathered children of the mountain and the valley for catechetical instruction. With a heart deeply sensitive to nature, it would not be surprising that Mother Seton would have used examples from rock and river, flowers and forest animals in teaching the children “to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.” The members of the Sisters of Charity Federation have a long history of involvement in education on every level. How do we as individuals and in our ministries heed the call of Pope Francis to “education in environmental responsibility.” Think of a Sister or an associate who is a model of an environmental educator. What quality of theirs would you like to develop in yourself?

If this prayer is done alone you might journal for a few minutes about your experience; if in a group, share for a few minutes your story of the model environmental educator.



Let the hand be conformed to the heart.

In Vincent's spirit of efficacious charity, chose a way in which you can engage in environmental and climate literacy education. If the prayer is done in a group, you can discuss and chose and action together. Individuals might choose from the suggested actions below:



Distribute copies of the Federation *Laudato Si'* Committee's "Spend a Month with *Laudato Si'*" which can be found at this link -

http://www.scnj.org/images/justicepeace/SIX_WEEKS_WITH_LAUDATO_SI_2.pdf



Add an environmental education note to your emails – perhaps a quote from *Laudato Si'* or an energy saving tip.



Make some suggestions to groups you belong to for better environmental practices. *The Green Meeting Guidelines of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth* might be a help

http://www.scnj.org/images/justicepeace/Green_Meeting_Guidelines.pdf



Start a "Green Team" in your parish or ministry to educate about more sustainable use of energy and other resources.



Start a *Laudato Si'* reading and reflection group in your parish, ministry or local bookstore.



Often local universities or environmental groups sponsor lectures. Check out their calendars and organize a group of people to attend.

Closing Prayer

Reader: We raise our voices in prayer in petitions taken from *Laudato Si'*. We respond, **“Creator God, hear our prayer.”**

- That we may hear the cry of our sister Earth because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her, we pray...
- That we might recognize that the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all and make the changes of lifestyle, production and consumption in order to combat global warming, we pray...
- That God may open our hearts to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, we pray...
- That we might hear the call to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet may be as God created it and may correspond to his plan for peace, beauty and fullness, we pray...
- For a deep reverence toward creation, that we might experience everything, soil, water, mountains, as a caress of God, we pray...
- That the Spirit of God may deepen our recognition of the nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily acts, we pray...
- For all followers of Jesus, that we may recognize that living our vocations to be protectors of God’s handiwork is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience, we pray...

Final Prayer

All: God of Boundless Charity,
at the beginning of time
you joyfully shared your self in creation
in all its breathtaking beauty
and wonderful diversity.
Help us to chose life
that we and all Earth’s creatures might live.
We call on heaven and earth to witness the choices we make.
We call on Vincent and Louise,
we call on Mother Seton and all our founders.
We call on our kin, all Earth’s creatures to witness the choices we make.
For the sake of Earth,
for the sake of those made poor,
we choose life!
Amen.



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