

CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Feast of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, January 4, 2018

Welcome to the first issue of the *Charity Earth Network (CEN) Newsletter* for 2018. With this issue we complete our second full year of publication. This issue, for the feast of Mother Seton, contains two items. The first is a talk given by Fr. Terrence Moran, Director of the Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth for the October 25, 2017 Convocation of ROAR (Religious Organizations Along the River). The talk *Rejoice and Resist: A Spirituality of Activism from Laudato Si' of Pope Francis* was the keynote presentation at a gathering that brings together environmental activists who want to explore the spiritual roots of activism. Sr. Carol De Angelo, SC of New York is also an active member of ROAR.

The second item is *The Great Journey of Boundless Charity: A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment*. The ritual attempts to make connections between the story of the universe and the charism of the Company of

Charity – begun by Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac and developed over the course of 400 years by the Congregations that claim their charism. This ritual invites the members of the Federation, sisters, associates, and partners in ministry, to experience the action of Boundless Charity through the story of the universe with its dramatic moments of grace. Often ritual helps us to integrate new information in a deeper way. Feel free to use and adapt this ritual – it would be perfect for assemblies/chapters; gatherings of associates, or even for use with students in our schools and boards and others in our sponsored ministries.

Please share your reactions to the CEN Newsletter, offer to write an article, or let us know hopeful news from your Congregation. Mother Seton prays, “Who are we to praise you? But we can call on creation to praise you.” May the example and prayers of Mother Seton enable the whole Company of Charity to give voice to creation’s song of praise.

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.**

Rejoice and Resist: A Spirituality of Activism from *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis

Shortly after midnight on March 6, 1854, nine men, stole onto the grounds of the Washington Monument, then under construction. They poisoned the watchdog and, at gunpoint, tied up the night watchman. They went to all this trouble in order to smash a piece of marble and dump it into the Potomac. A call had gone out to world leaders to donate pieces of marble to be incorporated into the monument to the father of the American Republic. This odious hunk of marble has been donated by Pope Pius IX, the head of the Papal States, a territory soon to be lost, but at that time comprising a third of the Italian peninsula. It was absolutely intolerable to these patriots that a piece of stone from a man who was an autocratic ruler, a figure of ignorance and superstition, an enemy of science and reason, could be used to honor the father of the American experiment.

We live in strange times, my friends, since, 163 years later, the successor of George Washington is the figure of autocracy, of ignorance and superstition, an enemy of science and reason; and the successor of Pope Pius IX, Pope Francis, is one of the major world figures who most supports the scientific consensus about climate change; the world figure who speaks with the most urgency about the necessity for a concerted global effort to transition to sustainable energy and who invited an atheist scientist to present at the press conference at which *Laudato Si'* was rolled out. So if you despair of the possibility of radical change – here is a breath takingingly radical change for you – but the challenge we face can't wait 163 years.

I want to reflect with you on *Laudato Si'* under the double perspective - Rejoice and Resist. Our resistance, our activism, according to Pope Francis has to be rooted in and refreshed by our ability to rejoice and to praise.

I once heard a talk by Brian Swimme, a physicist and cosmologist, who is often dismissed by his scientific colleagues because of his willingness to explore the spiritual implication of science. He was speaking to a conference of Spiritual Directors International; a group of people who wondered what contribution spiritual direction could make in a world of raising temperatures and acidifying oceans. Swimme identified the roots of climate chaos as primarily spiritual. So the solution was not primarily technological but spiritual. He said that the problem is not that there is a lack of scientific information. Scientific information is plentiful and readily available. The problem is spiritual. This information is not entering the human mind and not being integrated by the human spirit because it is blocked by the dominant story of Western civilization. Unless there is an inner change of that story, no merely technological solution will do the job.

Here are some elements of the dominant story of Western civilization:

-Earth has no intrinsic value but is merely the stage for human activity. This seems to be supported by the Genesis creation story that God took a few days of stage-setting of the universe and then the really important stuff starts to happen when humans appear on the scene. There is a mere few days of pre-history to the human in the Genesis story. But science tells us that in reality the first eyes developed in the Cambrian period (about 540 million years ago). The incredible beauty of creation unfolded for billions of years without any eye, let alone a human eye, to see it!

-Humans are radically separate from and superior to the rest of Earth.

-In the human person, the eternal element is the spiritual and the body is just the car in which the soul rides around for a relatively short period of time.

-The human person has an inherent dignity and an eternal destiny; Earth does not.

What we have in *Laudato Si'* is astounding: the leader of a religious tradition that helped to form this dominant story, systematically deconstructing it. Pope Francis says:

-Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or a mere setting in which we live (139).

-“Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of God’s love and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection,” (77). So a subatomic particle, a quark, that exists for a millisecond is enfolded in divine affection.

-“There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, a mountain trail, a dewdrop, a poor person’s face,” (223). Not just the human but all of creation is endowed with a mystical meaning.

-Contemplation or spirituality is not just a journey within, a journey to discover the divine in our souls; rather it is also an outward journey of relationship to everything that exists and to the divine present in Earth.

-That all beings, and indeed God too, live in a web of inter-relationships (240).

-Pope Francis highlights in St. Francis a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

-If Pope Francis has only said this line, it would have been enough for me: “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.”

Let that sink in – it’s the most radical thing in *Laudato Si'* for me – that for those who follow the way of Jesus, indeed for any person seeking to live a good life: care of creation is not optional or secondary – therefore it is obligatory and primary. There can be no authentic spiritual life, no authentic human life without it.

Elements of the radical Evangelical right want to promote global violence and aren’t perturbed by the prospect of destruction of Earth’s life systems because their cosmivision is of a final Armageddon in which Earth will be destroyed. For them, human violence and climate chaos are hastening the day of the final divine conflagration when God will destroy Earth and start over afresh. How different the vision of Pope Francis: “eternal life will be a shared experience of awe in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place.” All beings, not just the human, are destined together for transfiguration, for transformation not conflagration.

As you know, LS is framed around the first poem written in the Italian language – St. Francis’s Cantic of the Creatures. But Francis only mentions four creatures in his Cantic– earth, air, fire, and water. In medieval cosmology, everything was made of these; they were the building blocks of reality. So all creation is made of the same stuff and all beings are kin to one another. St. Francis with poetic intuition anticipated what science now confirms – everything that exists shares a common origin and is joined in radical relatedness.

“Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them ‘to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason’. His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.”

This quote presents a needed challenge to our activism. Does our activism overwhelm people with unpleasant information? Does it promote feelings of guilt and powerlessness? Or does our activism awaken something in people that is akin to falling in love?

Pope Francis reminds us that our resistance, our activism has to be rooted in relationship with creation. If we spend more time at meetings than we do outside, something is the matter. We invite you, at the end of the day, instead of rushing off to the next thing – to spend some time on this beautiful land and water. That’s a practical way of acting against the mental construct we have – that a day spent talking with other people is of more value than a day listening to Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Air, Sister Water.

The sisters I work for sponsor a college on our campus, the College of Saint Elizabeth. One of the core courses is called “Earth: Yours, Mine, and God’s” – it attempts to promote Earth literacy through an interdisciplinary approach that combines Earth Science, theology and philosophy. In this course I show students a slide of ten corporate logos – the Nike swoosh, McDonald’s golden arches, etc. There has never been a student who couldn’t identify every one of them. Then I show slides of the trees and plants on the campus – and there’s rarely a student who can identify even the most common of them – oak, pine, crocus. When global marketing has so thoroughly colonized the consciousness of the young, we are in deep spiritual trouble.

The famous activist, founder of 350.org, Bill McKibben wrote a book whose title is *Eaarth* – with the extra “a”. McKibben says that the human presence of the planet has now so altered the planetary life systems that it is no longer the same Earth on which humans first appeared so it needs a new name. Even with his sense of urgency over climate chaos, McKibben says – Earth will never be more beautiful than it is now and I want to spend every minute I can enjoying that beauty.

Kenneth Leech was an Anglican priest who spent most of his ministry in the East End of London, historically one of the poorest sections of the city, before recent gentrification. Leech speaks of “the dangers of activism”. I won’t ask for a show of hands but see if you find yourself reflected in this list.

- a. a neglect of inactivity, rest and stillness
- b. a neglect of close friends and neglect of self
- c. a life built on frenzy and compulsive business (I once lived with a priest from Nicaragua who said, “No American ever answers no to the question – Are you busy?”)
- d. a constant sense of urgency and lack of time
- e. a tendency to despise such things as beauty, joy, music, amusement, laughter, and dancing and to see them as luxuries.
- f. the commitment to pseudo-certainty – no room for doubt, perplexity or uncertainty
- g. a spirituality of indignation, frustration, and condescension that often turns to bitterness and pessimism in middle age.

Pope Francis devotes a section of LS to Sabbath: a day when we do not struggle to reshape the world according to our plans and agendas but during which we receive reality as a gift. How many of us practice Sabbath on even a monthly basis, let alone on a weekly basis?

Pope Francis says, “Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary.” He calls us to “a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption.” Do people perceive in our often frenzied activism anything that looks like “deep enjoyment”? If we want to challenge at a profound level our capitalist culture that birthed climate chaos, contemplation and sabbath are the most counter-culture things we can do.

W.H.Auden wrote a poem on the death of Yeats: *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*

Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice.
With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress.
In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountains start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

We will make a vineyard of the curse and release the healing fountain when we environmental activists learn to teach the free person how to praise.

Resist: What kind of resistance flows from a life of praise and rejoicing?

I don't know if the saying is original to him, but one of my heroes and mentors, peace activist Philip Berrigan often said: "Dissent without resistance is consent." If we are merely noticing and disagreeing but not resisting, we are allowing ourselves to be carried along by the tide of our own destruction.

What we are resisting is what Pope Francis calls "the technocratic paradigm." This model

- is a model of confrontation and control;
- is based on the false notion of unlimited growth (Has there every been a politician of any party who did not promise to "grow the economy.");
- is reductionist in reducing everything to a question of science or technology;
- dominates economic and political life;
- sees profit as the only criterion;
- fosters a kind of specialization that blinds us to the big picture.

Our resistance must be rooted in what Francis calls "integral ecology" – not merely a matter of adding ecology and stirring, of green washing and trendy marketing:

"Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

Since a mindset that sees the human as separate from Earth is what got us into climate chaos, only an approach which sees the integral flourishing of Earth can save us.

Many of you have probably read Naomi Klein's daunting 2014 book *This Changes Everything*. She finds good news in climate chaos. If we choose to face it, it will also force us to face every intractable human problem as well. Unregulated global capitalism and melting glaciers and women abused by Harvey Weinstein are just different faces of the same planetary phenomenon.

In her 2017 book *No is Not Enough*, Klein affirms that people need to be galvanized by a utopian vision; “we need to exercise the utopian muscle.” We need to revive the memories of the labor movement, the women’s movement, the civil rights movements, when ordinary people were galvanized to act for great causes...and won. I was privileged a few years ago to visit the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta where Martin Luther King was pastor. What most impressed me was not the beautiful sanctuary and the pulpit which was the site of MLK’s powerful preaching – it was the church basement. It looked like every basement of a house of worship that you’ve ever seen – cracked green linoleum floor, long folding tables and chairs, battered coffee pots. It was also holy ground because it was there that ordinary people dreamed, and plotted and planned and strategized, over and over, for years; they exercised their utopian muscle – and of such people revolutions are made.

Again, Pope Francis reminds us in *LS*: “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us,” (205).

A special strength of *LS* is the attention Pope Francis gives to indigenous peoples:

“In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture, (146).

I’m sure all of us were moved by the resistance at Standing Rock– an absolutely stunning example of the kind of world we are working for. On the table in front of me is one of the tags worn by those at Standing Rock who were practicing civil disobedience by risking arrest. A Native Elder at Standing Rock commented – the most important thing is not that we stop the pipeline; the most important thing is that we had indigenous peoples and colonizers living together trying to learn a new relationship with the land.

You may have seen in the news recently that Pope Francis has called for a high level meeting, a “synod” for the Amazon basin; the first time to my knowledge that a synod was called not for a country or group of people but for a bioregion. And one of Francis’s goals for this synod is to make indigenous peoples “principal dialogue partners.”

Our resistance must mean a lot of showing up for one another, across usual ideological and cultural lines. As Naomi Klein observes, echoing Pope Francis:

“Instead of ranking issues, we start from the premise that we live in a time of multiple, intersecting crises, and since all of them are urgent, we cannot fix them all sequentially. What we need are integrated solutions, concrete ideas for how to radically bring down emissions while creating huge numbers of unionized jobs and delivering meaningful justice to those who have been abused and excluded under the current extractive economy.” (Klein, 2017, p.238)

Environmental activists are often off-putting by the unintentional impression we give that the polar bear on the melting glacier is more compelling to us than the minimum wage worker. We in the environmental

movement need to be not just in our echo chambers but be in conversation with multiple partners in our polarized society. It's a time for strange bedfellows and unconventional alliances.

Pope Francis tells us that our utopian muscle is also strengthened by essential, small gestures. There was an article in *Orion* magazine last year called "Forget Shorter Showers" by Derek Jensen. He says that it's meaningless for us to take shorter showers as a gesture of sustainability. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities and actual living breathing individual humans. Collectively, municipal golf courses use as much water as municipal human beings. So take your luxuriant 20 minute shower as long as you're advocating against Bechtel, Nestlé, and Pepsi Cola. Jensen has an important element of truth but he misses the point. Of course we have to protest industrial use of water and commodification of water. But we also have to act out of the spirit that water is sacred. No parent says, "I have four kids; it's no big deal if I loose one. I can always get another." All that water wasted down the drain of my shower is sacred. Without that inner spirit of awe and sense of kinship with our precious Sister Water, all our protesting of Bechtel or Pepsi will not bring about the new world we need. And so Pope Francis says:

"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," (211).

Wendell Berry, patriarch of the American environmental movement, wrote a biography of Harlan and Anna Hubbard who lived a Walden Pond life on the banks of the Ohio River. They live near the site of a local campaign against a power plant in which, to everyone's amazement, they declined to participate.

"Later, I understood that by the life they led Harlan and Anna had opposed the power plant longer than any of us, and not because they had been, or ever would be its "opponents." They were opposed to it because they were opposite to it, because their way of life joined them to everything in the world that was opposite to it. What could be more radically or effectively opposite to a power plant than to live abundantly with no need for electricity?"

If our activism is based on anger, ego, violence, grand gestures – it won't get us where we need to go. "To live abundantly with no need of electricity" is the ultimate resistance. What motivates *Laudato Si'* and must motivate us is abundant life. As Pope Francis says, "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise," (87).

To conclude our reflection, I invite you to share with me a Buddhist vow. Usually, Buddhist vows are famous for flexing the utopian muscle – "Though beings are numberless, I vow to save them all." This one invites us to the more modest goal of not burning out.

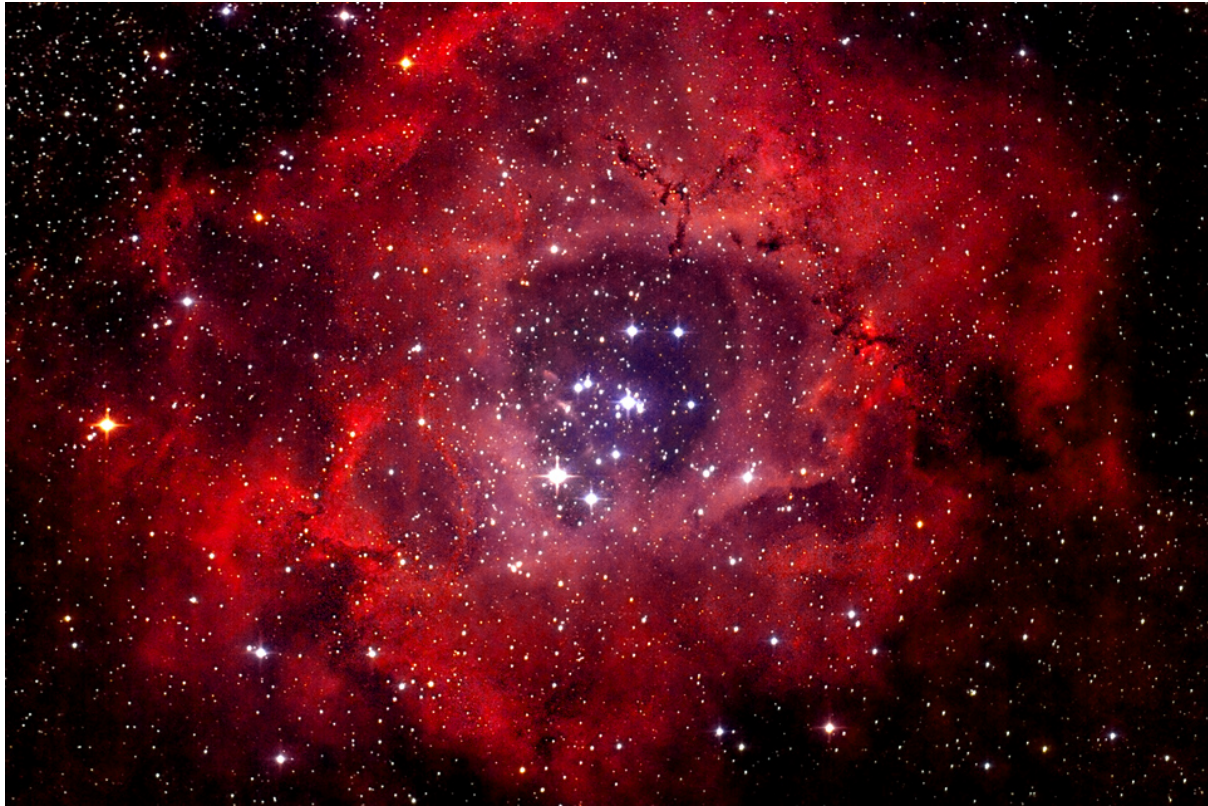
Aware of suffering and injustice, I, _____, am working to create a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. I promise, for the benefit of all, to practice self-care, mindfulness, healing, and joy. *I vow to not burn out.*

Mushim Patricia Ikeda

May our resistance flower from the rich soil of joy!



Fr. 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.



The Great Journey of Boundless Charity
A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment

INTRODUCTION

This ritual in its original form was designed by Connie Barlow and can be found here <http://thegreatstory.org/ritual-gratitude.pdf> This version of the ritual attempts to make connections between the story of the universe and the charism of the Company of Charity – begun by Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac and developed over the course of 400 years by the Congregations that claim their charism. Twelve of these Congregations now form the Sisters of Charity Federation. This ritual invites the members of the Federation, sisters, associates, and partners in ministry, to experience the action of Boundless Charity through the story of the universe with its dramatic moments of grace.

Feel free to adapt this ritual – adding the names of sisters and places that are significant in the history of your Congregation.

ENVIRONMENT FOR THE RITUAL:

The ritual involves a number of objects and symbolic gestures. It's important to prepare and rehearse ahead of time so that the experience is seamless and prayerful. Attached to this text is a handout with the responses that will be used by the participants. If they would like a copy of the whole text, distribute it only after the ritual, so that people are engaged in the ritual action and not keeping their attention on a paper. The leader or reader announces the title of each section (**in bold**). *The ritual gestures are indicated in italics and may be performed by the leader, reader, or one of the participants.*

Two tables are need – one in a central place visible to all where the ritual items will be placed; another, off to the side, where things can be kept before they are needed. In larger groups the leader and reader may need microphones.

Items needed:

- meditation bell
- small dishes of glitter glue (available in a craft store)
- a large candle
- pitcher of water and large bowl
- branch for sprinkling
- dirt
- incense stick
- a piece of chocolate (e.g. a chocolate kiss) and/or fruit (e.g. a seedless grape, strawberry or orange slice) for each participant.
- a large tree branch
- a digging stick
- 2 large stones
- pita bread
- a white plate that can be blackened in the candle fire
- copies of the full text for the leader and reader
- handout sheet for participants

The Great Journey of Boundless Charity **A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment**

Leader: Elizabeth Seton and her sister Mary spent long intervals at the farm of their Uncle William Bayley in New Rochelle, New York. In fact, Elizabeth spent her entire eighth year of life there. Later in her life, Elizabeth wrote about her girlhood days in Pelham:

Reader: “I delighted to sit alone by the waterside, or wander for hours on the shore singing and gathering shells. Every little leaf and flower, or insect, animal, shades of clouds, or waving trees were objects of vacant, unconnected thoughts of God and Heaven.”

Imagine Elizabeth Seton, reclining in the grass of a meadow, gazing into the night sky. Her “vacant and unconnected thoughts” draw her spirit – out of our solar system, out of the Milky Way, back through space and time to the very origins of the universe itself, into the heart of creative Charity aflame...

Sound a bell

1. The Great Radiance

Leader: In the beginning is the Great Radiance. In a moment of grace, all of space, all of time, and all energy flares forth from the primordial Mystery. From this Great Radiance, 13.8 billion years ago, the Universe begins its great journey. What creativity will unfold? What wonders will emerge in the billions of years before us?

Reader: “The principle end for which God has called and assembled the Sisters of Charity is to honor Jesus Christ our Lord, Source and Model of all charity.” This calling, this assembly, this mission began here!

Leader: In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the Great Radiance.

All: We are grateful for the Great Radiance. We are awed by the Mystery from which the Universe flares forth.

2. The Birth of Galaxies and Stars

Leader: As the Energy of the Great Radiance expands and cools, matter emerges and congeals into clouds of hydrogen. These coalesce into the communion of galaxies – billions of galaxies. At a moment of grace, the first stars ignite within these galaxies, fueled by the marriage of matter and gravity, fusing the abundant hydrogen into helium. And then the biggest stars go further, forging all the chemical elements within their bellies and then offering their gifts in the blinding bursts of supernovas. All the calcium in our bones, all the iron in our blood, all the carbon and nitrogen and oxygen in our DNA – all these elements are forged in the bellies of giant stars.

Reader: Here are present all the elements that will make up the bodies of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, of Frederic Ozanam and Elizabeth Seton, of (name founders or key members); the elements that will feed the chemical processes that will fuse their generous hearts, their creative intellects.

Someone anoints the heads of each participant with “stardust” (glitter glue that can be bought in any craft store) with the words, “You are a child of the stars, made of stardust.”

OR

The participants turn and greet the people near them with the words, "You are a child of the stars, made of stardust."

3. Lighting the Sun

A large candle is carried ritually into the prayer space.

Leader: Among the hundreds of billions of galaxies can be found a lovely spiral galaxy, the Milky Way, where second-generation stars are swirling into being from the rich brew of supernova stardust. One of these is our star, the Sun, and its eight planetary pups and their moons, who came into being 4.6 billion years ago in a moment of grace. Our Sun is too small to become a supernova, but it will provide its nearby planets with a secure and steady banquet of warmth and light, day in and day out, for billions and billions of years. Oh what creativity will arise in this new star system!

Reader: Imagine (name one of the early educators in the community) Sister X in front of the first class at (name of school). Her hand that traces a word on the blackboard; the eyes of the students who see it and their brains that process this information; this entire process of education is fueled by energy from the sun. The sun is an active and irreplaceable participant in every ministry of education.

Leader: In our hearts we call forth gratitude for our star, the Sun.

Response: "We are grateful for the our star, the Sun, whose generosity lights up the sky."

4. The First Rain

A participant pours a large pitcher of water slowly and noisily from on high into a glass bowl. This forms the background as the Leader and Reader read.

Leader: On planet Earth, third stone from the Sun, there occurs a moment of grace as the planet cools: water condenses from the steamy atmosphere, and rain falls for the first time. Rain falls and falls. The oceans fill and begin to respond to the moon, rolling with the tides, and rivers flow through the ever-flowing continents.

Reader: They are all here: the waters of the Seine crossed in countless journeys of charity by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac; the waters of New York harbor that Elizabeth Seton contemplates from her house on the Battery; the waters of the Atlantic crossed by millions of immigrants; the X and all the waters crossed in mission by the Sisters of Charity of _____; the waters that burst from every mother's laboring womb; the water that flowed from the open side of the Crucified Jesus; the tears our founders shed in joy, anger, frustration, prayer; all these waters are here.

Leader: In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the gift of liquid water.

Response: We are grateful for the rains and rivers and oceans of Earth.

5. The Emergence of Life

Leader: The rain cycles among ocean, continent, and atmosphere. Rain running off rock carries vital salts and minerals into the ocean waters, while magma continues to refresh Earth's crust. In a moment of grace, emerging from rock and water, the first living cell pulses into existence some 3 billion years ago. From that cell will evolve all the creatures of the sea. Forever after, life on Earth will build cells and bodies from the earth's elements and liquid water.

Reader: These first living cells are fused with the energy of Incarnation. In them Caritas made flesh already stirs.

Participants are sprinkled with water using a green branch and the water from the bowl.

6. The Coming onto Land

Leader: The oceans teem with bacteria, algae, jellyfish, sponges, trilobites, urchins, and fish. Some of the fish live in shallow coves, their fins becoming sturdy pegs for scuttling along the bottom like crabs. In a moment of grace some 350 million years ago, some of these fish venture out onto land, pulling and pushing themselves with their peg like fins. And so, the first amphibians are born, where our limbs still bear the traces of our four-finned ancestry.

Dirt is poured into the bowl; a sufficient amount so that mud is formed.

Leader: We are creatures of rock and soil, merged with water.

Let us stand now, rise up with our amphibian ancestors, struggling against the pull of gravity to celebrate the gift of sturdy limbs. [Pause]

Let us breathe deeply now, breathe with our amphibian ancestors to celebrate our inheritance of lungs and the freshness of air. [Breathe]

Reader: Here is born the voice of the Incarnation; here is born the voice that will speak of the blessedness of peacemakers. Here began the breath of peace that the Risen Jesus sent forth over the apostles. Here began every word of education, healing, comfort, and advocacy spoken by the Company of Charity across the centuries – all born here.

7. The Emergence of Mammals

Leader: Please be seated. In a moment of grace, amphibians give rise to reptiles, whose eggs can withstand the stress of dry air. Out of the reptiles will come dinosaurs, birds, and mammals. The dinosaurs easily claim the continents, the birds the skies. Meanwhile, the mammals stay small and wary for tens of millions of years, adapted to a life of darting from one safe burrow to the next, favoring the cover of night. Creatures of darkness, our ancestors develop a powerful sense of smell. Even today, odors call forth within us emotions and memories deeper than the realm of reason and word. . . deeper than the realm of sight and sound. Deeper than the realm of reason and word; deeper than the realm of sight and sound. *(A participant lights an incense stick and walks around to disperse the aroma. Pause while people experience the smell).*

Reader: Imagine Blessed Miriam Teresa at prayer in Holy Family Chapel in Convent Station (or other sisters in your Congregation's history), breathing in and out the incense laden air. The sense of presence that she experiences, the peace, was born here.

8. Into the Trees

Leader: I ask you now to close your eyes. And then, 65 million years ago, a great meteor flares forth from the heavens, crashing to Earth, turning day into night for many months. There is darkness ...darkness ... utter darkness. The plants die, the dinosaurs die, the little mammals huddle and hibernate in burrows. And when the sunlight returns, the mammals begin to come out of their burrows. Open your eyes to what is now around you, the devastation, the vacancy of life.

But the Great Radiance of Mammals is about to begin, and you are a part of it! Your descendants will co-evolve with the buzzing insects, the fluttering birds, the colorful flowers!

One lineage of mammal will take to the trees. *A participant holds up the branch and adds it to the prayer space.* These are the primates. Feel your eyes moving from the sides of your head to the front of your face, allowing you to see depth. Now you can leap flawlessly from branch to branch. Your heritage of night vision evolves to accommodate the colors of day, allowing your descendents to one day gasp in the presence of a rainbow. All the while, paws for scampering and burrowing are becoming instruments for grasping. I invite you now to take in the wonder of your hands. Admire your supple primate hands with your depth-perceiving, color sensitive eyes. Know that all these were forged in the welcoming branches of trees... trees: our cherished partners in evolution.

Reader: The hands of the Company of Charity – hands that clasped other hands in friendship; hands that move with animation as they speak; hands that heal and nourish; hands that pushed pen across thousands of pages; hands that built and blessed; all those hands born here.

Leader Call: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the trees of the forest that sheltered and challenged our primate ancestors."

Response: "We are grateful for our partners in evolution: the glorious trees."

Leader: "I invite you now to take a piece of chocolate and a piece of fruit. While still in the trees, our ancestors partake of food that the trees provide: leaves and seeds and fruits. The trees respond, in turn, luring us by sweetening the pulp of fruit so we might, unawares, disperse their seeds. Our bodies respond, too: we evolve a yearning for fruits and a tongue that can alert us to bitter plant poisons. Let us now eat this chocolate and fruit together with joy, and give thanks for the coevolutionary dance of plants and primates."

9. Out of the Trees

Leader: As the climate dries in our original Eden, the African forest opens into savanna. Our primate ancestors spend less and less time in the trees and more and more time on the ground, where they search for insects and dig for roots and tubers. Might the digging sticks that ferret out the yam and the carrot be the first human tools?

Reader: All the tools of the carpenter of Nazareth find their beginning here; all the instruments of art and music, of craft and culture, from quill pens to printing presses to computers, every technology of healing, every tool of education – every resource used in the ministries of the Sisters of Charity is born here.

Participant mimics digging with the stick.

10. Time of the Hunt

Leader: Some digging sticks now become weapons, tipped with chipped stones. With these we set out on the communal hunt. Is it the hunt that urges us to sign to one another, and then to speak to one another? Whatever the impetus, we know that in a moment of grace, symbolic language emerges in the human, and with it our capacity to teach and learn from one another and sing songs of thanksgiving

Reader: The voice of Jesus, Charity made flesh – parables and beatitudes, comfort and challenge, prayer and protest – all were born here. The voices of every Sister of Charity raised in prayer, in song, in instruction or advocacy – all born here.

SONG

**This is holy ground.
We're standing on holy ground.
For our God is present
And where God is, is holy.
This is holy ground
We're standing on holy ground
For our God is present
And where God is, is holy**

11. Firemakers

Participant strikes two stones together, mimicking starting a fire by friction.

Leader: Humans learn to harness and maintain flames lit by lightning. Later, we discover how to beckon fire to appear whenever and wherever we wish. We become the firemakers. Do we feel Earth trembling with foreboding? With fire we can now flush game, alter the landscape, preserve meat, fend off predators, keep warm, and roast away toxins from seed and tuber.

12. Farmers

Leader: I invite you now to pass the bread and tear off a piece for yourself. About 10,000 years ago, in a moment of grace, our kind learns not only how to find and prepare seeds, but how to plant and nurture them. Humans can now stay in one place year after year, and in densities never before possible. As you take and eat this grain, share it with your neighbor and speak in reverence the names of the homelands where your forebears tilled the soil.

Participants say aloud the names of the homelands of their ancestors.

13. The Desecration of Earth

Leader: We come to today, and the awful truth that in humans, inventiveness often outpaces wisdom and restraint. As Thomas Berry has written, 'The glory of the human has become the desecration of Earth. The desecration of Earth is becoming the destiny of the human.' [pause] Farmed and overgrazed soils are washing into the sea. Earth's fire makers are now burning fuels in such abundance that we are changing the very composition of the atmosphere — blackening our souls.

A plate is held over the candle fire until soot is formed. A participant shows it to the group.

Leader: We are driving into extinction the biotic richness of this beautiful Earth “What can be done? What can be done?”

14. Reclaiming the Past, Revisioning the Future

Leader: What is to be done? What is to be done? Our patrons Vincent and Louise, Mother Seton and (name Congregation’s founder) listened to dreams that showed them the solution to what seemed like impossible obstacles. The same energy that filled them, the same love that compelled them is ours. In silences now – feel that energy and rest in that love.

Pause for silent reflection opened and closed by a bell. There may also be a period of sharing at this point; participants can share how the ritual spoke to them and/or how they feel energized to action.

Leader: To conclude this ritual, let us sing an old earth-centered chant with an awareness of the new cosmology. Let us retrieve the depth relationship our ancestors had with the soil, the air, the fire, and the water. And let us replenish these concepts with the awesome wonder and intimacy we now can draw from the new story, the Story of the Great Journey of Boundless Charity in creation...

Singer: leads group in singing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOyvkgXjRos>

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water
return, return, return, return.

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water
return, return, return, return.

Aye ay, aye ay, aye ay, aye ay

Aye oh, aye oh, aye oh, aye oh

Aye ay, aye ay, aye ay, aye ay

Aye oh, aye oh, aye oh, aye oh



*The Great Journey of Boundless Charity
A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment
Participant Handout*

1. The Great Radiance

Leader: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the Great Radiance."

Response: "We are grateful for the Great Radiance. We are awed by the Mystery from which the Universe flares forth."

2. The Birth of Galaxies & Stars

3. Lighting the Sun

Leader: "In our hearts we call forth gratitude for our star, the Sun."

Response: "We are grateful for our star, the Sun, whose generosity lights up the sky."

4. The First Rain

Leader: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the gift of liquid water."

Response: "We are grateful for the rains and rivers and oceans of Earth."

5. The Emergence of Life

6. The Coming onto Land

7. The Emergence of Mammals

8. Into the Trees

Leader: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the trees of the forest that sheltered and challenged our primate ancestors."

Response: "We are grateful for our partners in evolution: the glorious trees."

9. Out of the Trees

10. Time of the Hunt

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11. Firemakers

12. Farmers

Participants say aloud the names of the homelands of their ancestors.

13. The Desecration of Earth

14. Reclaiming the Past, Revisioning the Future

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water

renew, renew, renew, renew.

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water

renew, renew, renew, renew.

Aye ay, aye ay, aye ay, aye ay

Aye oh, aye oh, aye oh, aye oh

Aye ay, aye ay, aye ay, aye ay

Aye oh, aye oh, aye oh, aye oh