

# CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



## FEAST OF ELIZABETH ANN SETON JANUARY 4, 2019

Welcome to the first edition of the *Charity Earth Network Newsletter* of 2019! It's a year when the Federation will gather its members for an Assembly of the Whole in Chicago, June 13-16. Eco-theologian Ilia Delio, OSF suggests that the best translation of the Greek root word for "catholic" is "whole." For Delio, "catholic" is less a past reality to which we remain faithful than a future wholeness to which Catholics and the whole universe are directed. This issue of the *CEN Newsletter* invites us to contemplate that wholeness from a variety of perspectives. Cj Willie offers a report on last summer's *Sisters of Earth Conference* held at Mt. St. Joseph University of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. Participants were invited to move toward a future wholeness through the practice of active

hope. It's good to see highlighted the impressive commitment to sustainability of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati in an article in *Global Sisters Report*. The Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth offer their *Earth Examen of Consciousness* - a revision of a traditional prayer practice to promote a new human/Earth relationship. Our prayer service for the feast of Elizabeth Seton invites us to reflect on Elizabeth's trail mix snack on her boat ride from New York to Baltimore. What will nourish us as we move toward the future?

As always, we welcome comments, news items from the Federation Congregations, and, most especially, offers to write articles. Many blessings to all the members of the Federation as we move toward the wholeness of Unstoppable Charity.

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.**



*Mabel Navarro and Dorothy Calvani at the 2018 Sisters of Earth Conference*

## **Sisters of Earth Sr. Caroljean Willie, SC**

The mission statement of Sisters of Earth states that it is “an informal network of women who share a deep concern for the ecological and spiritual crisis of our times and who wish to support one another in work toward healing the human spirit and restoring Earth’s life support systems.” Originally founded by Roman Catholic religious women, membership now includes all women whose life and work exemplify care for creation and a desire to collaborate to promote sustainability at a global level.

This informal network began when three Sisters of St. Joseph organized a meeting which was held in July of 1994 at St. Gabriel’s Monastery in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. Approximately 60 women from 17 religious communities attended. Since that time meetings have been held biannually in different parts of the country. Today more than 100 women attend the biannual meetings and include teachers, gardeners, artists, writers, administrators, workshop and retreat presenters, mothers, contemplatives, and activists around the globe. Women have come from North and South America as well as Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

The theme of the Sisters of Earth 2018 conference was “Sharing the Wisdom, Shaping the Dream: Creating the Future We Want”. It was held in Cincinnati, Ohio where sessions were held at Mt. St. Joseph University, the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse and EarthConnection, an environmental center of the Sisters of Charity. This location was chosen partly because of the ancestral inspiration of Sister of Charity Paula Gonzalez who promoted sustainability and alternative energies through projects and teachings throughout the world. An opening activity included a prayer service at Sister Paula’s gravesite.

Joanna Macy’s book *Active Hope* served as a focal point for the gathering. Mercy Sister Jan Stocking and Diza Velasco, two directors of [Rockhaven Ecozoic Center](#) in Missouri, guided participants through an experiential day focusing upon the four elements of Active Hope: gratitude, pain for the world, seeing through new eyes, and bringing forth something new. They combined the wisdom of Active Hope and the [Pachamama Alliance](#) “Awakening the Dreamer” program asking the following questions: Who are we? Where are we? How did we get here and what is possible? And where do we go from here? A “Despair Ritual” enabled Sisters of Earth to

own the pain of the world and enter into the anger, despair, sadness and fear they felt in order to open themselves to new and creative ways of embracing the future.

Several congregations shared inspiring stories of how their communities are addressing the needs of a threatened planet:

The [Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill](#) in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, talked about their garden project which involved their community and school children. Sister Barbara Ann Smelko said that “Two weeks after planting potatoes, seeing green shoots emerge in the field was the most thrilling and exciting thing any of us had witnessed in a long time.”

Marge Kloos and Mary Bookser, councilors on the [Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati](#) leadership team, described how their community is following Paula’s inspiration by living into the meaning of transformational community life and the common good. They noted how the congregation is changing the witness and the look of their campus through education and by addressing climate change with sustainable technologies: geo-thermal energy efficiency measures, replacement of 25,000 light bulbs with LEDs, and installing a solar array for six of their sisters’ residential homes. These changes have resulted in saving thousands of tons of carbon emissions. It also sends excess energy to their utility company for six months each year.

The [Sisters of Charity of Nazareth](#), Kentucky is an international community operating throughout the United States as well as in India, Botswana and Nepal. Their 2000 assembly and a study of ecology and feminist cosmology called them to look at their own lifestyles. In order to reach their 2017 goal of zero emissions, they developed principles to guide decision-making: protecting Earth and all creatures; developing a sense of environmental awareness; caring for the poor and marginalized, especially women; repurposing/relinquishment for mission; and collaboration. Caroline Cromer, the congregation’s sustainability director, continues to help the community implement a variety of projects stemming from their years of reflection. These include a conservation easement on property in Pennsylvania, putting aside carbon offset money from travel to plant trees, bio-gas production and the creation of a plastic-free zone in their Indian community.

Due to illness Joanna Macy was not able to join the group via Skype, but Anne Simons-Bucher of [Canticle Farm](#) in Oakland, California filled in for her. Canticle Farm works for food security, holistic health and food sovereignty through organic gardening, permaculture, herbal medicine and stewardship in an urban environment. It is an intentional community that includes intergenerational, interracial, and interfaith members that hosts workshops, retreats, circles and visiting teachers, welcoming people from around the world to grow and learn together. Their goal is to dismantle walls in yards, minds and lives. Anne stated that “Great honesty, truth telling, love and action are required to address the foundational causes of much of the ecological degradation, human cruelty, and economic disparity that exist in the world today.”

Mabel Navarro, a Salvadoran Sister of Earth living in Victoria, British Columbia, reflected upon the weekend and the meaning of Active Hope: “Active hope is like a magic wand of pure love that always keeps us enlightened and in connection with the positive constructive energy from the universe, even if we are facing darkness in our lives and around the world. Our choices must be taken with consciousness and from the energy of pure love that sustains everything in the universe. From that source we are always going to harvest the results of our deeds. The pure love of the universe will never fail us.”

Joanna Macy’s powerful ritual The Mandala of Truth that was used at the Sisters of Earth Conference can be found here <https://workthatreconnects.org/truth-mandala/> For other resources from Joanna Macy <https://www.joannamacy.net/>

## SISTERS OF CHARITY EARTH EXAMEN OF CONSCIOUSNESS

*Fr. Terrence Moran, Director of the Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth has adapted the traditional prayer practice of the evening examen of consciousness to invite us to reflect on our relationship to Earth at the end of each day. This prayer references the mother pelican which is the community symbol of the Convent Station SCs. The following lines can replace final paragraph of the examen if a more generic text is desired: "I conclude my prayer with a moment of contemplative silence. I rest in gratitude for the wonder of life. I repeat to the rhythm of my breath the words of the song of the angels of Bethlehem - Glory to God...Peace to all Creation."*

- As the day draws to a close, I pause to recall that I am in the presence:  
...of our Creator God who looked with pleasure on everything that was made;

...of Jesus who delighted in the flowers of the field and the birds of the air;

...of the Spirit of wind and flame, the energy that fills the cosmos.

- I ask for the grace to see creation as God sees it – with delight in its wonders and with a heart broken by the cries of Earth and people in poverty.
- How have my life choices impacted creation today?  
I recall some moments when I delighted in creation today – e.g. in a sunrise, a flower, an animal companion, in an experience of human goodness.
- I recall with gratitude some moments when I chose to live in loving relationship with creation – e.g. when I was careful in my use of water or electricity, when I made healthy food choices for myself and for Earth, when I chose non-violence in relationships and speech.
- I pray for the grace of conversion for the moments in my day when I failed to live in loving relationship with creation – e.g. when I too rushed or busy for wonder and awe; when I was wasteful or selfish; when I failed to treat people and other creatures with respect.
- I look with desire and hope toward tomorrow. What is one thing I might choose to do to live in deeper harmony with God, myself, other people, all creation?

I conclude my prayer with a moment of contemplative silence. I rest in gratitude for the wonder of life. I call to mind our symbol of the pelican – a symbol which sees God as a nurturing mother. I pray that I may be a nurturing presence for all Earth's creatures.



## Congregations seek sustainability through goals to reduce waste, go organic

*Dan Stockman in an article in the National Catholic Reporter's Global Sisters Report features the sustainability efforts of three congregations of women religious, one of which is the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. Find below the section of the article on the SCN and Carolyn Cromer, their Director of Ecological Sustainability*

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/congregations-seek-sustainability-through-goals-reduce-waste-go-organic-55679>

When the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, updated their mission statement in 1995, they decided at the last minute to add six words to the end: "and to care for the Earth."

An afterthought at the time, those six words now have become integral to everything the international order does.

"We really take that seriously," said Sr. Susan Gatz, president of the community. "We began asking ourselves on every level: How are we helping or hurting the Earth?"

As the years passed and asking that question became part of everyday life, the sisters realized they often didn't know the answer. Or when they thought they knew the answer, they feared it might be incomplete or based on assumptions rather than evidence: Electric vehicles seem like a good alternative, but might not be if your electricity comes from burning fossil fuels.

"If you want to help the Earth instead of hurt it, the question becomes, 'So how do we do it?' " Gatz said. "We wanted to look at everything — water, electricity, recycling."

Sisters have been working to [protect the environment](#) and [teaching others](#) to [protect](#) it for decades. In recent years, many communities have worked to permanently [protect their own land holdings](#) from [development](#).



The roof of one of the motherhouse buildings of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, is covered with solar panels to generate electricity. (GSR photo / Dan Stockman)

But in 2014, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth realized they wanted to take their efforts further. They also knew they would eventually need to make decisions about the land and buildings they own: the motherhouse campus that was once home to hundreds of sisters, Nazareth College and Academy, the infirmary, the novitiate and a large working farm. What should the land and buildings be in the future, and, more importantly, how could they be used to help care for the Earth?

"We've done some really good things, but we realized we wanted to go to the next level," Gatz said. "We needed someone in the community whose focus was only that."

The sisters began talking to other organizations that had sustainability directors and worked out a job description, which they also sought input on from experts. When they were ready to search for job candidates, the search committee even included someone from [Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest](#), a 15,000-acre preserve nearby focused on the bond between people and nature.

Carolyn Cromer was named director of the sisters' Office of Ecological Sustainability in 2017. She wasted no time in getting to work: Within a few months, she had set a goal for the congregation's Western Province (the United States and Belize) to become greenhouse-emissions free by 2037 and the Eastern Province (India, Nepal and Botswana) to do the same by 2047.

"That goal is in no way extreme," Cromer said. "But we wanted to set that goal, because if not us, then who?"

There are also opportunities in areas that might be surprising. The congregation's Eastern Province has an extra 10 years to meet its goal of zero greenhouse emissions, but it may meet its goal before the Western Province. Where the sisters minister in India, Nepal and Botswana, there is often little or no infrastructure, so it is not only easier to start out using sustainable energy such as solar power than it is to convert, but sometimes, the sustainable method is the only one available, Cromer said — you can't connect to the grid if there is no grid to connect to.

Recently, Cromer recruited some sisters to examine every piece of waste the campus generated in one day so sisters and staffers could understand the amount of waste created and to see what is being treated as waste that might be able to be reused or recycled instead.



*Carolyn Cromer, director of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth's Office of Ecological Sustainability, discusses the order's efforts to protect the environment at its motherhouse in Nazareth, Kentucky. (GSR photo / Dan Stockman)*

Cromer has also gotten the community to examine its use of fossil fuel-burning vehicles.

"The care committee took a good, long look at the number of miles we drive," Cromer said. "The emissions are significant. So we're purchasing one or two electric vehicles this year."

And because burning fossil fuels generates almost two-thirds of the electricity in the United States, [negating much of the environmental benefit](#) of electric cars, the community hopes to eventually have a solar-powered charging station for the new electric vehicles.

Cromer, who has degrees in both ecology and forestry, said a lot of the questions in sustainability don't have easy answers. The motherhouse campus, for example, has been farmed and landscaped and manipulated for more than a century, so returning it to its natural state is not as simple as not mowing the grass.

Having Cromer on staff has turned even simple projects into researched changes. When some vinyl flooring needed to be replaced in one of the buildings, the sisters planned to install carpet until Cromer pointed out that carpet can emit chemicals into the air for years. Instead, the floor was painted with low-emission paint.

"Nazareth isn't its own little thing," she said. "We sit in a watershed and in a region, and all of it is interconnected. So we can't be planning in isolation."



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### **ELIZABETH SETON:**

### **THE ALMOND, THE RAISIN, AND THE CALL OF THE FUTURE**

*(Environment for prayer – a picture or statue of Elizabeth Seton, bowls with almonds and raisins)*

#### **Call to Prayer:**

Elizabeth Seton tells us she ate almonds and raisins as she entered the Chesapeake Bay on the way to Baltimore. They were like modern day “trail mix,” easy foods to carry and preserve on a journey. It was to be a decisive journey for her – three days of choppy waters on a ship called the Grand Sachem. She was making a decisive break with her New York roots and setting out for the sake of mission, to open a school, and eventually to found the Sisters of Charity. Like Elizabeth, we set out on mission – the Great Work of leaning a new human/Earth relationship. And like Elizabeth, we need to make a decisive break with our past – our habits of consumption and styles of life that have brought the life-systems of our home planet to a point of crisis. I invite you to join Elizabeth in snacking on almonds and raisins as we contemplate our journey and what we need to sustain us.

*The leader passes around the bowl of almonds.*



**Reader:** Almonds have replaced the peanut as the most popular nut. California is the only state in the United States that commercially produces almonds. Thousands of endangered king salmon in northern California’s Klamath River are threatened by low water levels because water is being diverted to almond farms. If more water is not released into the river soon, the salmon will be seriously threatened by a disease called gill rot.

*The leader passes around the bowl of raisins.*





**Reader:** Raisins are dried grapes. Grapes and humans have shaped each other for thousands of years. Approximately 8,000 years ago somewhere near modern day Iran, human beings bred a local wild berry that grew in a vine into what we now consider grapes. This ability to grow a delicious fruit year after year in the same place, among other vegetables and animals that could be raised by humans, is what allowed human beings to form the first towns, which over time became cities, and which allowed our modern lifestyle to emerge. The modern grape's dependence on human interaction is what ecologists call a symbiotic relationship. This means that grapes and humans help each other live and thrive. Overtime, the grape as we know it has become dependent on humans to survive and has even traveled far from its birthplace near the Caspian Sea, wherever humans have roamed. In return, the grape has become a symbol of human civilization. From the earliest writings, grapes have been used to describe our transition from animals living in the wild to people that live in cities and towns all over the world.

*The leader passes around a bowl of raisins.*

**Leader:** In the almond we have an example of a human agricultural practice that has been harmful – it has depleted waters and endangered other species. In the grape we have an example of a relationship between humans and the natural world that has developed in a mutually beneficial way. Let's contemplate in silence the future of the Company of Charity. With what habits or activities do we need to make a decisive break to ensure a healthy human/Earth relationship? What habits or activities do we need to foster? After the time of reflection, I will invite you to share your thoughts.

### **REFLECTION AND FAITH SHARING**

Leader: We close our prayer, raising our voices in song. Like Elizabeth, we look to the future, the children of tomorrow call to us. How will the charism of Charity today make their future just, peaceful, and verdant with life? *(The song is sung to the tune of Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow)*

Come, children of tomorrow, come!  
New glory dawns upon the world;  
the warring banners must be furled,  
the earth become our common home

From plain and field and town there sound  
the stirring rumors of the day;  
old wrongs and burdens must make way  
for all to tread the common ground.

Divided we have long withstood  
the love that is our common speech.  
The comrade cry of each to each  
is calling us to humanhood.