

# CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



## Earth Day, April 22, 2016

Welcome to the first issue of the Charity Earth Network (CEN) Newsletter! The Charity Earth Network was begun in 2016 to respond to the expressed wish of members of the Sisters of Charity Federation to network around Earth issues. The current conveners of the CEN are Carol De Angelo, SC (NY), Terry Moran, (Saint Elizabeth) and Caroljean (Cj) Willie, SC (Cincinnati). The response to our invitation has been tremendous – over 100 sisters, associates and collaborators. It speaks to the growing awareness in the members of the Federation of the truth of the words of Pope Francis “Living our vocations 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,” *Laudato Si'*, 217.

*Carol*

The CEN Newsletter will come out three times a year – January 3 (Elizabeth Seton), April 22 (Earth Day), and September 27 (Vincent de Paul). In our first issue you will find an Earth Day ritual integrating the Charity charism by Terry Moran; an interview with one of the Charity “ecoforemothers” Paula Gonzalez, SC by Cj Willie; a reflection on *Laudato Si'* through a Charity lens by Carol De Angelo; and a quick tour of ecological activities in Charity Federation Congregations by Cj.

Like Earth itself, the CEN is held together by mutuality and interdependence. Please let us know what you think of the newsletter, share resources, suggest topics for future articles, or volunteer to write an article yourself. You can communicate with us at [pjei@scnj.org](mailto:pjei@scnj.org)

*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.**



## Charity Greening

Join us for a journey around the Federation Congregations and celebrate the many efforts to learn more sustainable ways of Earth/human relationships. There's a lot happening that should be a source of hope for us. It is clear that Federation Congregations are taking seriously the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, (211) "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. 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."

**Daughters of Charity (St. Louise Province):** Corporate stance on bottled water/Sisters of Charity of Nazareth: Corporate stance on water; SCN Earth Statement; Statement of Policy and Investment Objectives on Socially Responsible Investing; SCN Guiding Values and Principles for Decision Making on Land and Buildings/Sisters of Charity of New York: Collaborative Renewable Energy Project between Sisters of Charity of New York and College of Mount Saint Vincent which will decrease use of fossil fuel substantially through installation of solar panels and other means/Sustainability practices at Congregation meetings such as no bottled water, no styrofoam, and use of recyclable utensils as much as possible/Land Use Policy and Procedure that is followed when discussing and making decisions on property/Sisters Hill Farm/Sisters of Charity of Halifax: Endorsed the Earth Charter and committed to acting on its implications/Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati: Halted the use of Styrofoam on campus; Use of cloth napkins in dining room; Sisters may now choose a green burial (no casket, simply wrapped in a sheet)/Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception: "Rooted and grounded in our charism of charity, we live fully while continuing our mission in the energy and movement of the Circle Way:...caring for the earth and the environment."/Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth: Committed to educating themselves and others in the theology and sacredness of creation; Make ecological concerns a key factor in decisions as individuals, local

houses and the larger community/Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth: passed Public Stand on Climate Change/Global Warming; monthly audit on different areas of sustainability done in each house; whole campus Earth Day celebration in 2016; 2 Ecospirituality Reflection Groups meet monthly/Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill: Energy audits in houses in U.S. and Korea; Korean Province prepared a Guide for Ecological Living; Provided education and various activities on ecology for members in both the U.S. and Korea; Vision Statement on Ecology/Eco-Prayers with Elizabeth, Louise and Vincent/Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha: built a contemplative trail through our woods and fields to help us immerse ourselves in nature; open for public use; implemented green landscaping with a 50% reduction in mowing; Reduced fossil fuel use through energy upgrades and renovations; Installed solar panels on one residence; Purchased 5 hybrid vehicles; buying smaller and more energy efficient cars; Reduced wasted and increased composting/Les Religieuses de Notre Dame-du-Sacre-Coeur: As a congregation studied the book *This Great and Beautiful World* by Bernard Menard, OMI and members of the JPIC team; Have banished styrofoam glasses and plates from use in their houses; Focusing energies on climate change and sustainability with other Federation Canadian communities, but work more closely with two other French-speaking communities in New Brunswick.



***Laudato Si'* Calling Us to Imagine the Charism of Charity Anew**  
 Carol De Angelo, SC

Imagine St. Vincent de Paul with us today, at a "conference", talking to us of "Love inventive unto infinity" as it relates to *Laudato Si'*. What would our response be to his "What do you think my dear Sisters (and Associates)?" This article is an invitation to imagine the energy of love in new and broader, deeper ways. It is also an invitation to a conversation among ourselves as the *Charity Earth Network*, "How does *Laudato Si' - On Care For Our Common Home* open us to a new understanding of the charism of Charity in this threshold time?"

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis is calling us to a new spirituality, to a new way of seeing, acting, being-in-love. Pope Francis with his emphasis on integral ecology affirms the new worldview that everything is related. What we do affects others. Our actions, no matter how small make a difference. He is calling us to action – action that involves interior conversion and transformation, at both a personal and corporate level. I wonder how our growing understanding of integral ecology as expressed in *Laudato Si'* influences our living charity...now and into the future. Might we consider integral ecology and love as synonymous?

As a young sister, I gradually expanded my understanding of the Body of Christ and the communion of saints to include all of life, human and nonhuman, and beyond. Pope Francis, especially in *Laudato Si'*, confirms the journey that many of us have been on as we have come

to know ourselves as part of a 13.8 billion year ongoing developing universe. *Laudato Si'* summarizes and brings to deeper depths our call as Christians to live mutually enhancing Earth-human relationships (Thomas Berry). Yes, the charism of Charity continues in new ways as we address climate change and its impact on those most vulnerable; as we speak for the rights of Earth, water, air, soil as well as of people; as we exercise our power as consumers to demand just and right relationships with people, Earth and her resources; and, as we and our sponsored ministries recognize our role in living "integral ecology". I believe that we, on fire with the love of God and committed to living the charism of charity in this 21st Century, need to pay attention, and call ourselves and others to wake up to the richness expressed in *Laudato Si'*; some say the most important social teaching since *Rerum Novarum*. The conversion and transformation we are called to will birth new seeds and fruits of Charity, extending beyond the Company of Charity and grow the "Comprehensive Compassion" Brian Swimme so eloquently speaks of. Love is indeed inventive unto infinity.

As people steeped in the Vincentian tradition, we have internalized that those who are living in poverty, those who are vulnerable and on the margins reveal to us the face of God. Vincent, Louise, Elizabeth, Frederick and all our founders in the Company of Charity would say to us today that Earth is among the vulnerable and poor of our day. We cannot separate humans from our

home, Planet Earth, from all Creation. We need to pay attention to Earth, our common home, for “earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gn 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.” (2) As my/our experience of Earth as abandoned and poor expands, I wonder how might our witness of and living “lives of charity” also expand and deepen.

The part of the encyclical that speaks to and intrigues me the most is “Civic and Political Love” (Chapter Six, Section V). Though we have addressed civic and political love through systemic change for many years, we do not equate systemic change with love. “Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political,” and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world,” (231). Phrases such as “small gestures of mutual care”, “civilization of love”, “love in social life”, “culture of care” – speak to me of charity! WE ARE CALLED to make them REALITY! I think it important that we as the Company of Charity grapple with and break open the meaning of civic and political love to bring the charism of charity to a new level.

Over the years I am sure you, like me, have seen civic and political love practiced personally and congregationally and in sponsored ministries. Today, I experience it in new ways as our systemic change ministry deepens and broadens through networking and collaborating with organizations and groups at the global, national, state and local levels. To name a few, NGOs at the UN, NETWORK Lobby, Jubilee USA, Bread for the World, Global Catholic Climate Movement, and so many more. Since the 2014 People’s Climate March, the focus, email alerts, and advocacy for more just laws and policies by these diverse

**“Might we consider integral ecology and love as synonymous?”**

groups are interrelated, often connecting to effects of climate change on those living in poverty. These groups are partners with us as we seed and birth Charity anew in our world today.

The task of our times is to grow into a new way of seeing and living Charity, just as the Pope calls us to a new way of understanding ourselves and all creation. *Laudato Si’* as a call to action recognizes that our perspective, our thoughts and attitudes...our ways of being make a difference and create change. Love is energy and all things are possible because of the One Who Does More in Us Than We Can Imagine. We need to rethink the power of prayer and meditative practices, individually and communally. David Nicol in his book, *Subtle Activism* speaks of subtle activism, the meditative practice of focusing intentionally, especially as a collective whole, for the well-being and good of all - all peoples, world leaders, oppressed and oppressors, the whole community of life and all God’s Creation. We do this – to some extent. Think of community prayer. The Sisters of Charity of New York Life Transforming Spirituality group facilitated by Sr. Barbara Srozenski, practices this at its gatherings. I am sure that each reader can give examples. And so I wonder, “How might we invite ourselves and others to plant the seeds and till the soil of charity that flows through prayer and meditative practices to open us, our home, Planet Earth, the peoples of the planet, all God’s Creation to the energy of Love... inventive unto infinity.



*Sister Carol De Angelo, SC, is the Director of the Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation Office of the Sisters of Charity of New York.*



## **An Interview with Charity Earth “Foremother” Paula Gonzalez**

**Caroljean Willie, SC  
(Cincinnati)**

Paula Gonzalez, SC (Cincinnati) grew up in a rural community near Albuquerque, New Mexico. Paula noted that both her parents were teachers but also raised all of their own fruits and vegetables for the family so from a very early age she took an interest in the environment. She remembers that her father always told her “La tierra es bendita” (The earth is blessed) and that became integral to her spirituality. She holds a B.S. in Biology, a M.S. in General Physiology and a Ph.D. in Cellular Physiology.

A defining moment in her life was when the first pictures of Earth became available from space. From that moment forward Sister Paula has committed herself to environmental sustainability. She looked at property on the Motherhouse campus and determined that an old chicken coop could be turned into sustainable housing. Over a three-year period with 35 volunteers, multiple yard sales, and “junk” hauled from homes, schools and dumps to be recycled as floors, doors, cabinets and appliances, La Casa del Sol (House of the Sun) was completed in 1986. The house is a model of energy efficiency using solar energy and a wood-burning stove for heat. According to Sister Paula, “Given the finite nature of Earth and its resources, it’s essential that we make energy alternatives tangible.” “If someone says ‘Solar doesn’t work in Cincinnati’ we can point to La

Casa and say, ‘Oh yes it does.’ Sisters Paula and Mary Bookser continue to live in La Casa.

*EarthConnection*, Cincinnati’s first hands-on center for learning conservation techniques completed in 1995, began as a dream for Sister Paula following the Chapter of 1990. In writing the SC Vision Statement the Sisters challenged themselves to “live simply in a complex world, committed to the healing of our global home,” and to “risk being prophetic in church and society.” Like La Casa, *EarthConnection* was built with the help of many volunteers, multiple yard sales and “junk”. Paula envisioned *EarthConnection* as a center for learning and reflection about living lightly on Earth.

**“We need to  
move from  
the head to  
the streets.”**

Sister Paula has been a leader in the fields of alternative energies and environmental sustainability. Her prophetic voice has challenged thousands of religious and others throughout the country to make the connection between spirituality and sustainability. She believes that religious today must review the vows in the context of the signs of the times.

She noted that for many years religious served in traditional education, health care and social service institutions but that today those fields need to be viewed as interconnected and through the lens of a planet in peril. "Mental and physical health," she said, "are deeply affected by the state of the planet." Hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, etc. are the cause of multiple health-related illnesses. She sees the need for "appropriate education that leads to advocacy; the need to move from the head to the streets."



"Women religious need to look at what the vows are calling us to at this point in time, especially poverty," she said. She calls the moment in which we live a "moment of transformation"; a time to recognize that science and theology are not two separate entities but integrally related; a moment that is calling us to co-create a different world. She resonates deeply with the words of Judy Cannato, "May each of us participate fully in a personal evolution that transforms us and transforms our world."



*Caroljean (Cj) Willie, SC is the program director of **EarthConnection**, an ecological ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati.*

## Resources

*Erin Lothes Biviano, **Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action**, Orbis Press, 2016*

*Sean McDonagh, **Laudato Si'-Text and Commentary**, Orbis Press, 2016.*

*Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, **Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation**, Fortress Press, 2013.*



## Wisdom is a Tree of Life to Those Who Embrace Her Earth Day 2016

*In the space for prayer are placed a dish of soil, an incense stick or wind chimes, a candle, a pitcher of water and a basin.*

**Call to Prayer:** The book of Proverbs tells us – Wisdom is a Tree of Life to those who embrace her. (3:18) The theme of Earth Day 2016 is **Trees for the Earth. Let's get planting.** The Company of Charity began in a culture that lived close to the ground and was in tune with the rhythms of nature and times of sowing and harvest. Ever dear to the memory of the Sisters and Daughters of Charity is wooded Saint Joseph's Valley in Emmitsburg. Earth Day this year calls us to consciously reclaim our intimate relationships with trees – a relationship that is as close as our next breath.

### EARTH

Opening Song: Mother Earth, Our Mother Birthing  
(Words: © Norman Habel 1999 Melody: Praise, my Soul, the King of Heaven)

1. Mother Earth, our mother birthing  
Ev'ry creature from the ground.  
Jesus too was flesh and breathing,  
Kin to all that's green and brown.  
Celebrate with all creation:  
God has joined the web of life.

*A participant holds up a dish of soil.*

Reader 1: We give thanks for earth that we call our mother. She is the womb of life providing all we need. Her living soil feeds us; her rocks make our bones; her minerals are in our life's blood.

Reader 2: We give thanks for St. Vincent de Paul who grounded our charism in the good earth of service to God present in those made poor. May we sink our roots deeply into the good ground of that charism. Earth is sacred.

Reader 1: I invite you to press your feet into the ground beneath you and be conscious of Earth drawing you to itself and supporting you. Pray to be more firmly rooted in the Vincentian charism of Charity.

*Pause for silent prayer*

Reader 1: Let the energy of Charity root us!

All: Let the energy of Charity root us!

## AIR

2. Sister Air, our sister lifting  
Ev'ry creature born with wing;  
Jesus shared the breath of forests,  
Breath that makes our spirits sing.  
Celebrate with all creation:  
God has joined the web of life.

*A participant lights incense or sounds a set of wind chimes.*

Reader 1: We give thanks for air, though which we share in intimate communion with trees and all breathing things. Through air, the breath of God enters us. Through air, words of prayer and praise and prophecy come forth from us. Air is sacred.

Reader 2: We give thanks for St. Louise de Marillac, a beautiful breath of the Spirit. With her last breath she counseled us, "Take good care of the poor."

Reader 1: I invite you to breath deeply. Feel the oxygen, the gift of trees, filling your lungs. Feel the air that you send forth out of your lungs into the world. What energy do you want to send out into the world on this Earth Day? Pray for the whole Company of Charity that we might be an energy in the world of "good care for the poor," especially for our poor, broken planet.

*Pause for Silent Prayer*

Reader 1: Let the energy of Charity inspire us.

All: Let the energy of Charity inspire us.

## FIRE

4. Father Fire, our father burning  
With the sacred urge to live.  
Jesus' death completes the cycle,  
Bringing life beyond the grave.  
Celebrate with all creation:  
God has joined the web of life.

*A participant lights a candle.*

Reader 1: We give thanks for fire, the sun's gift that fuels all life on earth. This radiant heat and light is the source of energy for all beings, from the tiniest algae to the towering redwoods. We give thanks for every work of love and justice - all fueled by the fiery energy of the sun.

Reader 2: We give thanks for the fire of zeal and the sparks of creativity that filled St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. She bravely kindled the flame of Charity on the American continent and the world is radiant with her gift. What needs call for our creative spark now?

*Pause for Silent Prayer*

Reader 1: Let the energy of Charity impel us!

All: Let the energy of Charity impel us!



## WATER

3. Brother Water, brother pulsing  
Deep through ev'ry vein and sea,  
Jesus drank the very raindrops  
For our wine and in our tea.  
Celebrate with all creation:  
God has joined the web of life.

*A participant invites the group to reverence water by either pouring water into a basin and sprinkling the group or invites the group to bless themselves or each other with the water.*

Reader 1: We give thanks for the gift of water, for the oceans, home of life, for the clouds and rain that bring water to the land; for the springs that draw life-giving water up from the ground, for might rivers and majestic oceans.

Reader 2: We give thanks for all the members of the Company of Charity who traversed Earth's water in service of the mission. Women nourished by the springs of contemplation; women who poured the waters of healing women who quenched the thirst for knowledge. Inspired by our foremothers, what obstacles are we called to face so that God's living waters may flow freely to quench the thirsts of our day and time?

*Pause for silent prayer*

Reader 1: Let the energy of Charity free us!

All: Let the Energy of Charity Free Us!

Reader 1: In the Charity tradition, prayer must bear fruit in action. Discuss with the others who joined you in prayer, how to plant some trees. The following websites provide information:

Arbor Day Foundation

<https://www.arborday.org/>

National Wildlife Foundation

<http://www.nwf.org/trees-for-wildlife/about/tree-bank-information.aspx>

Planting Memorial Trees in US National Forests

<http://thetreesremember.com/>

*Fr. Terrence Moran is the Director of the Office of Peace, Justice and Ecological Integrity of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth.*



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