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To violate the principle of sustainability is to steal from our own children . . . to walk slowly down the path of destruction. Sustainability now becomes a central criterion for all human endeavors.

At Home in the Web of Life
Catholic Bishops of the U.S. Appalachian Region

perspectives

Just a few decades ago, the concepts of *ecological sustainability* and *sustainable development* were virtually unheard of. For most of our 2.6 million year history, humans were a relatively benign presence on Earth. Our numbers, economic activities and technological interventions were consistent with the natural limits of the planet. But within the last 50 years, all of this has changed. Our world population has doubled to 6.2 billion, the global economy has expanded seven-fold, and our technologies have made it possible for us to drain the resources of the planet. In the early 1980s, humanity's collective demands began to exceed Earth's capacity to regenerate; currently, our demands exceed that capacity by 20 percent. If, as a species, we do not change how we

THE GIFT OF A FUTURE

by Mary Turgi, CSC

inhabit the planet, this margin will only widen, probably at an accelerating pace — a bleak prospect for future generations of all Earth beings. It is no wonder that *sustainability* and *sustainable development* have moved

to the top of the global agenda.

Sustainability is usually understood as meeting the genuine needs of people today

- * without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and
- * without diminishing the natural diversity of life on Earth or the viability of the planet's life-support systems.

In other words, sustainability ensures the gift of a viable future to coming generations.

Given our present situation, choosing sustainability will require profound change for our species. As Ronald Wasowski describes in *The Shape of Sustainability*, we will need to transform how we produce and use goods and bring our levels of consumption in accord with Earth's natural limits.

Sustainable living will also mean changing our worldview to recognize and respect certain primary principles:

- * Earth is a living system in which everything is related to everything else. What affects one part of the system affects all.
- * Every being is a unique manifestation of the mystery of life. All have intrinsic value and rights to existence.
- * Diversity is critical to survival and ongoing evolution on Earth.

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“ . . . providing the basic needs and education, opportunities for creativity and in cities, and wilderness for other creatures.”

Sustainability is easy to define, but what is its actual “look and feel,” and how do we achieve it? Though looking into the future is always uncertain, we can imagine a number of features of a mature sustainable society.

THE SHAPE OF SUSTAINABILITY

by Ronald Wasowski, CSC

From a conceptual perspective:

- ✦ Human development will be primarily about *being* more, not having more. People, nature, and other beings – not possessions – will be our primary sources of joy.
- ✦ Equity for all the world’s people – present and future – will be strongly embraced, both personally and politically.
- ✦ The material quality of life for all people will be substantively equal and sufficient to *thrive*, not merely survive.
- ✦ Earth and all its life forms will be revered for their beauty and intrinsic worth, not just their value for us.
- ✦ The best scientific talent will be devoted to improving human understanding of the environment and using resources efficiently.

From a practical view:

- ✦ Systems science and the science of complexity will be well understood and applied to reduce negative ecological impacts.
- ✦ Tax systems and other economic incentives will reward reuse and recycling and penalize unnecessary use of virgin materials.
- ✦ Material goods will be designed to be durable rather than disposable – lasting at least five times longer than comparable items today.
- ✦ Solar and wind technologies will replace less efficient, polluting forms of energy production.

- ✦ Environmental costs will be honestly calculated and paid directly by those who incur them, not shifted to others in present and future generations.

How can we begin to make this future a reality? A good place to start, especially for those in the global North, is with our own lifestyles. Our Scriptures, our Congregational documents and our vows as religious call us to live simply and equitably – to be satisfied with meeting our needs rather than our “wants.” By some estimates, the per capita consumption rates of 29 of the wealthiest nations are five times that of developing countries – and 10 times higher than necessary.

Nationally and globally, we need to refashion our economies to reduce extraction of resources and promote their efficient use and reuse. As members of Holy Cross, we can make a significant contribution at both national and global levels by advocating policies that

- ✦ mandate a “reduce, reuse, recycle” model of production/consumption and
- ✦ ensure an “honest market,” one that gives economic value to nature’s services and reflects the true environmental costs of production.

At the international level, we must continue the ecological dialogue begun in conferences like the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the 1997 Global Warming Summit in Kyoto, Japan. Successfully lobbying our governments to ratify and implement agreements forged at such meetings is a critical step toward sustainability.

Perhaps, as theologian Sallie McFague suggests, one of the most significant things we can do to ensure a sustainable future is develop and promote visions of “the good life” that are not



cessities for all, universal medical care d meaningful work, time for family and friends, green spaces ~ Sallie McFague



»»» The Gift of a Future, **continued from cover**

As the *Earth Charter* reminds us, the human species is at a crossroads, a critical moment in Earth's history. We must join together and *choose* our future. All of us can contribute to creating a sustainable society by simply starting where we are and doing what we can. This issue of *Perspectives* highlights just a few of the ways members of Holy Cross around the world are working to create a sustainable future. We invite you to send us *your* story for publication on the HCIJO web site so we can continue to learn from and support one another. ■

Ultimately, sustainable development and sustainability itself are about collective values and related choices and are therefore a political issue, almost certainly the supreme global political issue of this century.

WorldWatch magazine, September/October 2003

good life" for humans are just — to *all* the world's inhabitants and to Earth itself. ■

This selection is adapted from a longer article "Seeking Manna for All" which may be found under *Perspectives* Resources on the HCIJO web site.

consumer-dominated: visions that are just and sustainable, visions that include

" . . . providing the basic necessities for all, universal medical care and education, opportunities for creativity and meaningful work, time for family and friends, green spaces in cities, and wilderness for other creatures."

At the root, McFague tells us, we need to step back and re-ask what *really* makes people happy. And we need to rethink which notions of "the

Ronald Wasowski, a Holy Cross priest of the Indiana Province, is a professor of environmental science and co-chair of the chemistry and physics department at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon (USA). A specialist in geoscience and using satellite images to monitor the environment, he also teaches astronomy and has particular interests in resource management and the voluntary simplicity movement.



Deforestation is a huge problem! Every day

Whenever I take the bus from Takoradi to Accra (218 km), losing many of our old-growth trees, and although timber c



As biology instructor and advisor to the Science and Math Club at Archbishop Porter Senior Secondary School for Girls in Takoradi, Ghana, Esther Entsiwah led her students in an ambitious tree-planting project that enhanced the school compound and many local villages. In this interview, Esther shares some of the educational and hands-on aspects of the program.

RELEAFING GHANA

An interview with Esther Entsiwah, CSC

Perspectives: *How did your students' tree planting project get started?*

Esther: At the beginning of each year, the Science and Math Club looks at issues affecting our country and the world and decides on some action to take. In 1998, we noticed that Ghana's patterns of rainfall were shifting and our rain decreasing. After some research, we realized that part of the problem was overharvesting of our trees. So the students said, "Why not take on tree-planting this year?"

We decided we'd make the project an educational experience for everyone in the school. Students used their club dues and bought a few seedlings — enough for two for each class. Then on Arbor Day, our head mistress declared a holiday and the whole compound — about 800 people — gathered for prayer, education around the history of Arbor Day in Ghana, and planting. After the

prayer, we went all about the compound with music and drumming while each class planted its own trees for which they became responsible.

That was the beginning. The next year, we received grant money from my Congregation and decided to begin planting fruit trees, which would be doubly useful. We've discovered that palm trees and umbrella trees do very well in our soil so we've planted about 50 on the grounds. Some umbrella trees are now quite tall and provide nice shade for the students. This is their practical reward for watering and taking good care of the seedlings!

P: *Then you expanded the program to some local villages. How did that happen?*

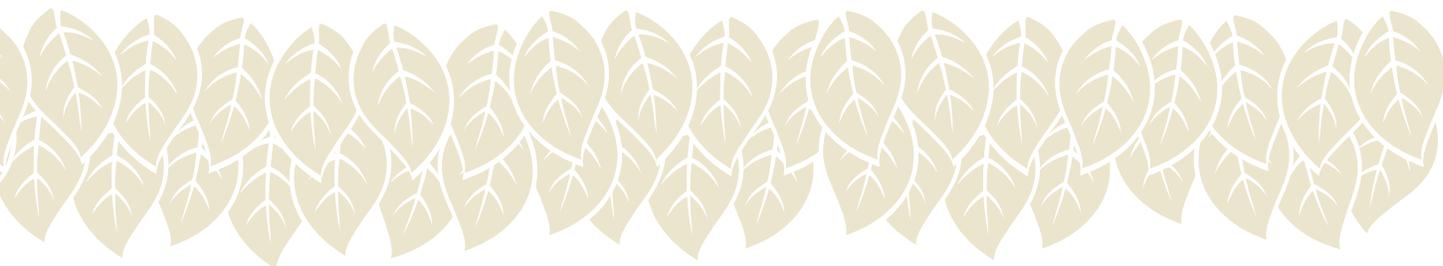
E: In 1999, we extended the plantings to places near the school. The students went to the villages in groups, talked to the chiefs about Arbor Day, planted trees and encouraged villagers to continue the process.

At the same time, we worked with local catechists. Many of the catechists come from villages where, because of poverty, people cut down

On Arbor Day 1998, over 800 teachers, staff and students at Archbishop Porter Senior Secondary School gathered to bless and plant tree seedlings. Graduates still continue planting trees in their villages/parishes and educating about the ecological importance of forests.



we see loads and loads of felled trees being hauled away. I see over 50 timber trucks loaded with huge logs. We are companies are supposed to replant, they don't always do it.



trees for charcoal and other domestic use or for sale. We taught the catechists about the impact of deforestation on the environment and why they should plant and care for trees. When they left for home, I supplied them with seedlings – fast growing trees that do not use a lot of water and are good for the environment. All of this planting – both at the school and in the villages – is still going on.

P: Tell us a bit more about Ghana's deforestation problems.

E: Deforestation is a huge problem! Every day we see loads and loads of felled trees being hauled away. Whenever I take the bus from Takoradi to Accra (218 km), I see over 50 timber trucks loaded with huge logs. We are losing many of our old-growth trees, and although timber companies are supposed to replant, they don't always do it. NGOs, churches, and individual citizens are trying to do something about these problems, but they can't make up for massive stripping of forests.



P: Your students have been very committed to the tree-planting project. Are they active in other environmental issues?

E: Oh, yes – our students are very well-informed about environmental problems and they are not afraid to speak up. We sometimes take them to meet with representatives of businesses operating in Ghana and the students are very challenging. They ask things like: "Do you know for sure that the waste coming from your plants is treated so that it does not affect water quality and temperature and kill the fish? Can you prove it to us?" The students know what they are talking about and they insist on answers!

They are also active in other ways. At the beginning of every rainy season, they write letters to groups in the city reminding them to clean up litter and keep drains clear to prevent flooding. And they have arranged with the Post Office to place similar letters in all the mailboxes. Just recently, our students joined others in the area in a letter-writing campaign urging Parliament to pass a law controlling the use of plastics.

But unfortunately, our students are not typical. Only about 40 percent of Ghanaians are aware of what is happening to our environment. That's why we need to do more and more education. Sometimes it's difficult to get the message across, but we've seen that once people really understand, they will use all their energy to make a difference! ■

Esther Entsiwah, a Sister of the Holy Cross, was a member of the faculty at Archbishop Porter Senior Secondary School for nine years. Currently, she is working toward a Master of Science degree in Administration at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.





Early in 2002, the *Earth Charter* was introduced to all 180 teachers of *Colégio Santa Maria* in São Paulo, Brazil with the aim of explicitly incorporating its values and principles into the curriculum. The theme of preserving and promoting life is a traditional one at the *Colégio*, but we found the *Earth Charter* energizing because it is a *global* initiative and its expansive vision of sustainability recognizes that human rights, social and economic justice, environmental protection, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. The *Earth Charter* gave us a new framework for thinking about and addressing all of these issues among ourselves and with our students.

A LITTLE HELP FOR MOTHER EARTH

by Diane Cundiff, CSC

After reflecting on the major themes of the charter, the faculty agreed that engendering commitment to a sustainable global society is a non-negotiable goal of a Holy Cross education. Teachers at all levels began reshaping course content and other learning activities with this in mind.

It is impossible to describe the wealth of ideas and actions generated, but I will mention a few to portray their variety and ingenuity.

One of our first activities was to look at classroom trash. The children separated paper, plastic, juice boxes, snack leftovers and pencil shavings and tried to answer questions like "What harm do we cause if we don't handle trash properly?" and "Can we do anything positive with trash besides make sure we don't throw it on the ground?"

To help answer such questions, we contacted a cooperative of "street rag pickers" to learn what they did with trash. After our talks with them, we began separating our trash into groups of clean paper, plastic, metals, and glass and "dirty trash" and making contributions to the cooperative. The 6-year-olds then decided they could better care for the "gifts of mother earth" and gather more trash for the cooperative if they involved their 600 classmates from the preschool and first grades and their families. The second graders spearheaded the same campaign for the 500 students in grades two through four and the sixth graders for the 600 students in the upper grades.

The trash project was just the beginning from which many other programs evolved.

- ✦ Students and teachers used geometry to plan vegetable gardens that were planted and cared for communally. The produce raised was given to elderly persons, street children and members of the cooperatives with whom students worked.
- ✦ A significant space was set aside on school grounds for eighth grade students to build compost heaps using dining room and plant waste. The compost produced was used to fertilize the school lawn and gardens and shared with families.
- ✦ Color-coded trash bins were placed throughout the school and "ecology guardians" roamed the grounds reminding everyone to use them correctly.
- ✦ A committee of teachers, students, and staff met monthly to devise ways to motivate and enliven lifestyle changes required for sustainable living: contests, reminder posters (especially in the bathrooms where there are captive readers!), and amazing displays using recycled materials.
- ✦ Students and teachers visited slums partially destroyed by floods that occurred because of trash dumped in the roads. Poor children in these slums were given school supplies to replace what they had lost.
- ✦ Families made and sold sandwiches to raise money for water cisterns in northern Brazil.
- ✦ Teachers, students, parents, government officials, researchers from the state university and media collaborated on a project to build solar heaters from inexpensive materials.



These heaters were set up as models in eight different slum areas so others could be built collectively by residents.

These are just a few of our projects. New ones are being developed continuously because we believe a sustainable future will not just happen. Sustainability will only be the fruit of individual and collective commitment to just, peaceful human relations and to the health of the natural world. The "war" we want to win is not in Iraq, but on the whole planet — one square meter at a time. ■

Diane Cundiff, a Sister of the Holy Cross, has ministered in São Paulo, Brazil, for 30 years. She is presently the principal of Colégio Santa Maria, which is sponsored by the Sisters of the Holy Cross and serves 2,700 students — children and adults from preschool through secondary levels.



The *Earth Charter* is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. The product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation about common goals and values, it seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

EXCERPTS FROM THE EARTH CHARTER

PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Toward this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

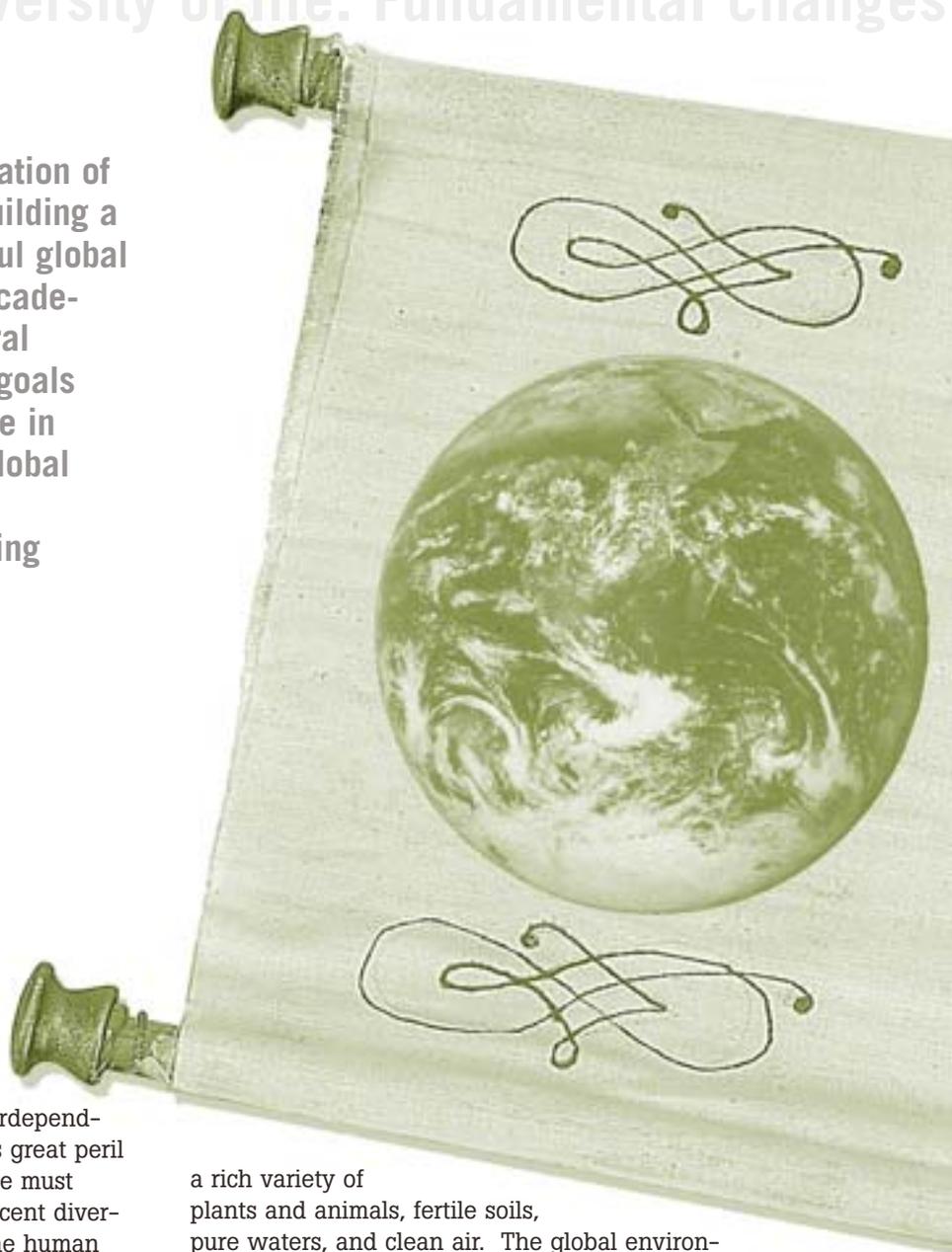
Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems,

a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous — but not inevitable.



The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

PRINCIPLES

Respect and Care for the Community of Life

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

Ecological Integrity

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

Social and Economic Justice

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace. ■

Excerpted with permission. The complete text of the *Earth Charter* may be found at www.earthcharter.org.

Holy Cross Services Corporation (HCSC) traces its roots back to 1929 when the Sisters of the Holy Cross first hired lay employees at Saint Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana. Those workers furnished housekeeping, maintenance, laundry, food and nursing services for the sisters.

Today, in addition, HCSC provides operating and management services for the properties and facilities owned by the Congregation, including residences and retirement homes.

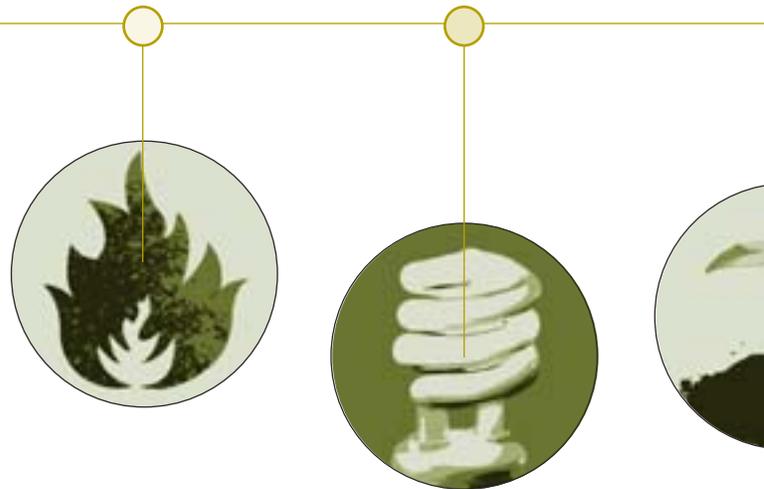
HCSC: CHANGING TODAY FOR TOMORROW'S SAKE

by Judith Johns and Marilyn Zugish, CSC

Since ecological sustainability is a primary focus for the Sisters of the Holy Cross, a few years ago, the Congregational Leadership Team charged HCSC to make "environmental impact" a key criterion in decision-making. Reducing our corporate ecological footprint is now an explicit part of the HCSC strategic plan and one of our chief goals.

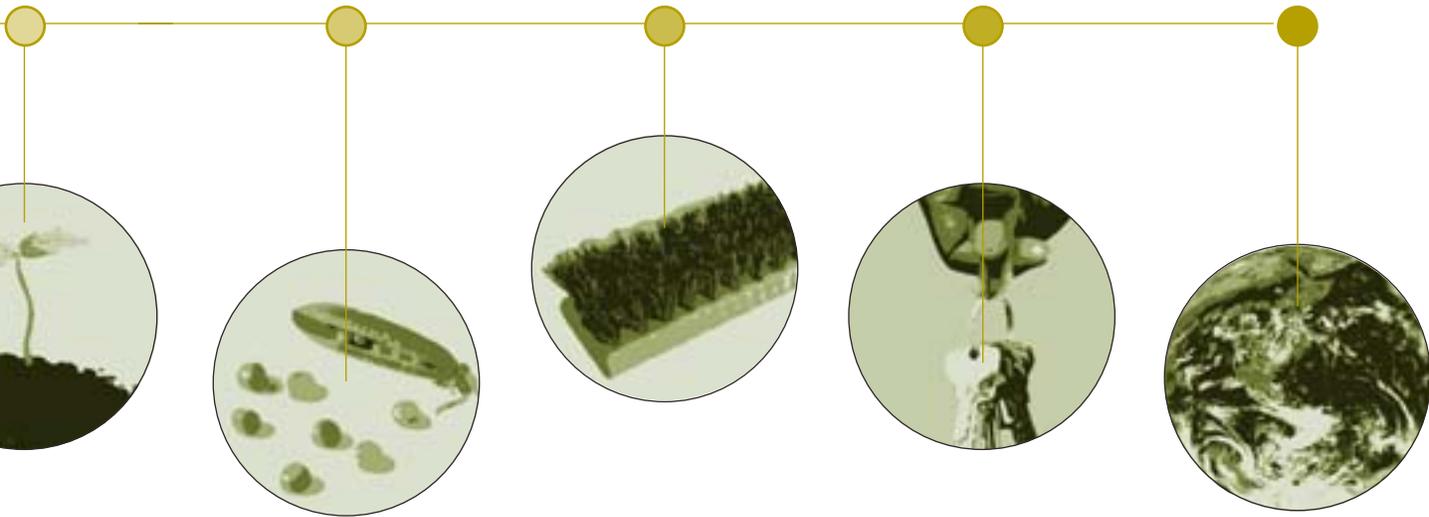
In 1999, the Congregation and HCSC engaged *Appalachia — Science in the Public Interest* to conduct an ecological resource assessment of Saint Mary's campus and make recommendations for enhancing the sustainability of the buildings and grounds. This assessment and resulting 10-year plan have become the framework guiding our environmental work both on campus and at other Congregational facilities.

Learning to live in greater harmony with Earth is an ongoing — and sometimes overwhelming — task. However, we believe we have made notable progress over the past four years.



- * Our Central Utilities Department replaced aging, environmentally destructive coal burning boilers with ones fueled by cleaner burning gas.
- * An electrical audit was done to assess energy expenditures and products, such as energy saving overhead lights, compact fluorescent lamps, occupancy sensors, photocells and timers, which are gradually being installed.
- * Our Grounds Department developed its own philosophy of environmentally friendly landscaping which includes reintroducing native plants acclimated to our weather conditions and resistant to local diseases and pests; using the fewest and least toxic chemicals possible; and utilizing deep, infrequent irrigation to conserve water.
- * Our Dietary Department is serving more vegetarian dishes to encourage sisters and employees to eat lower on the food chain.
- * Our Environmental Services Department is utilizing more environmentally friendly personal care and cleaning products: more absorbent paper towels, reusable cups and glasses, hand soaps and cleaning products without harmful chemicals, etc.
- * We have begun to purchase fuel-efficient, less-polluting gas/electric "hybrid cars" for the Congregation's vehicle fleet.

h Earth is an ongoing — and sometimes notable progress over the past four years.



★ This academic year, HCSC will collaborate with a *Community Leadership Team* of faculty, staff, and students from Saint Mary's College on a project titled: *Implementing the Earth Charter: Toward a Sustainable Saint Mary's College*.

Much of this progress is attributable not only to HCSC administration, but also to our employees, especially those on the Environment and Purchasing Committees. The Environment Committee investigates and recommends new ways to conserve resources, protect the environment, and encourage the use of environmentally friendly goods. With the Purchasing Committee, they review every product proposed for purchase to assess its impact on the environment and on persons using it.

In these efforts, one thing we have learned is that living/working sustainably is not always simple and straightforward. Sometimes sustainable practices can even seem "unfriendly" to nature. For example, the good of a total ecosystem may require that some wildlife populations be artificially controlled. The issue then becomes how to effect that control in the most humane way. Also, as human understanding of sustainability deepens, guidelines for sustainable practice evolve. Actions and processes that were once considered "good practice" sometimes become contraindicated. Building a reliable information network with access to current research, discussion and debate is critical.

We are beginning to realize that working toward ecological sustainability is a lifetime project — one that demands long-term commitment

and continual learning and unlearning. Over time, ensuring sustainability will require much more than changing how we do things. It will necessarily mean changing how we think, realigning the mindset of our species with the realities of a finite planet. This is a daunting challenge, but one that individuals and institutions alike must assume to guarantee the greater Earth community a future. ■



Judith Johns (left) is the chief executive officer of Holy Cross Services Corporation. A graduate of Saint Mary's College, Judith also has a Master of Science in nursing degree from Chicago's Loyola University and was formerly the assistant commissioner for health for the City of Chicago, Illinois.

Marilyn Zugish (right), a Sister of the Holy Cross and native of Seattle, Washington, is deeply interested in promoting sustainable development and Earth-centered spirituality. She currently serves on the Congregation's general leadership team.



My ecological footprint — determined by my ecological mindset — affects all of creation. We are all interconnected, one earth community. . . .

I've started using ordinary soap again — you know, the bar kind.

PERSONAL ECOLOGY 101

by Gretchen Dysart, MSC

For a while I used the new liquid soaps, but each time I returned to the grocery, I witnessed the effects of consumerism. More and more brands of liquid soaps and more choices within each brand, leading to more plastic bottles lining more and more shelves. Even though I recycled each one I finished, I knew I had to do something different.

When I brush my teeth, I don't let the water run continuously anymore. One day I put the stopper in the basin, watched the unused water accumulate, multiplied that amount by three times a day, then multiplied the result by 365 days. I don't let the water run continuously anymore.

When I receive cards in the mail and the card's inside page is empty, I tear that side off and use it to write simple notes — reusing not only the paper, but also the greeting or image on the front of the card. I'm also sending more e-cards.

I'm removing my name from catalogue lists, opting instead to peruse those catalogues on web sites. The number of catalogues, circulars and flyers that glut our small office is apparent from the constant overflow of our recycling bins.

I avoid using paper towels now. And I applaud the decision to stop using paper placemats in our cafeteria. Whenever I have the choice between using glassware or plastic, I choose glass.

I participate in recycling efforts in my city, my office and my local community. At times recycling is inconvenient, time-consuming and annoying. While I know the benefits, I often approach it

with all the enthusiasm one has for ascetical practice! Then I just do it.

I am pushing myself to become more aware of how often I drive alone — in my fossil-fuel burning car — running low-priority errands.

Just how much do my simple actions affect our world? I'm not sure about the planet, but I do know they affect *me*. Every intentional action I take — no matter how small — reminds me that I am not the only being on this planet. My ecological footprint — determined by my ecological mindset — affects *all* of creation. We are all interconnected, one earth community. . . . “The body is one, even though it has many parts; all the parts — many though they are — comprise a single body” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

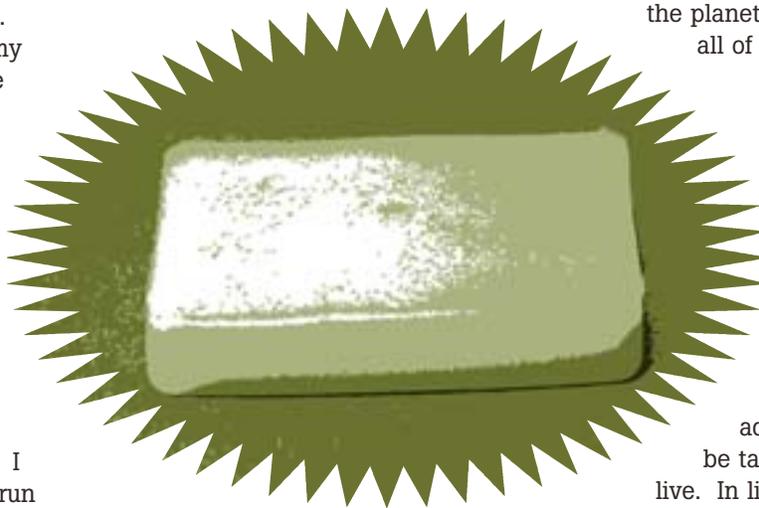
My simple actions *do* impact the Earth and all its beings. They must, because I know that *not* performing them is devastating the planet and endangering all of life.

Single-handedly, one bar of soap at a time, I am not going to stop the global ecological downslide. But I do believe in the power of *us*. Each of us can evaluate our lives and determine the actions that need to be taken wherever we live. In living our simple

decisions to educate, and to reduce, reuse and recycle, we will continue to be called, challenged and impelled to follow through with necessary next steps, whatever those might be.

P.S. This article is also being recycled; I'm sending it to my local Catholic newspaper! ■

Gretchen Dysart, a Marianite of Holy Cross, is a member of her Congregation's leadership team and represents the Marianites on the HClJO Executive Committee. She lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Could religious traditions help us rekindle a sense of awe and reverence for Earth's beauty and mystery? Could they help us find our proper niche as a species — to realize that “we are not only part of humankind, but of Earthkind . . .

. . . wonder may be a key to release the flourishing potential of our species and our planet. This may be the indispensable capacity of humans that religions can evoke in the presence of the mystery of life.

Book Review

WORLDLY WONDER: RELIGIONS ENTER THEIR ECOLOGICAL PHASE

Reviewed by Joan Quinn, CSC



Before reading Mary Evelyn Tucker's *Worldly Wonder*, I considered myself an environmentally conscious person. Now, I realize I had only scratched the surface of planetary consciousness.

Our current global situation, Tucker says, is fraught with irony. At the very moment we are awakening to the complexity and magnificence of the universe story and realizing how recently humans arrived on the scene, we are also increasingly aware that we are ravaging our home. Mindlessly extinguishing ecosystems and other life forms, we are unraveling the intricate web of life, “destroying the very basis of our continuity as a species.” In fact, we are “the first generations of humans to actually imagine our own destruction as a species.” But, Tucker notes, we *can* stem this loss of species and habitat. “. . . the choice is ours — to become a healing or a deleterious presence on the planet.”

At this moment, the great challenge for religious traditions is to move humans to a healing planetary stance. Religions are not equipped to provide scientific guidance on environmental issues, but they *can* create impetus for people to act in different ways. Religions shape values, orientations and worldviews; they have often been powerful forces for transformative personal, social and political change. What specific role could religion play in the face of ecocrisis?

In recent years, many of us have consciously tried to reawaken our appreciation of matter as a vessel for the sacred. Could religious traditions help us rekindle a sense of awe and reverence for Earth's beauty and mystery? Could they help us find our proper niche as a species — to realize that “we are not only part of humankind, but of Earthkind . . . not simply human beings, but universe beings”? Could religions help us celebrate our kinship not only with other humans, but with all life forms?

Yes, says Tucker, but only if religious traditions transform themselves:

- * moving beyond exclusivist claims to truth to genuine dialogue,
- * enlarging ethical concerns to the other-than-human world,
- * re-embedding religious rituals and symbols in nature, and
- * balancing a pull toward transcendence with appreciation of the sacrality of this world.

continued on page 16 >>>

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- * Spend time in nature reawakening *your* sense of “worldly wonder.”
- * Reflect on the *Earth Charter* individually and with your local community.
 - Discuss ways to implement the *Earth Charter* in your personal and communal lives.
 - Explore the resources on the *Earth Charter* web site: www.earthcharter.org.
 - Choose one area of the *Earth Charter* to work on with people with whom you minister.
 - Encourage local and national organizations to endorse the *Earth Charter*.
- * Calculate your personal *ecological footprint* – your impact on Earth based on your consumption patterns: www.earthday.net/footprint/ (multicountry and multilingual).
- * Commit to at least one practical step to reduce your “ecological footprint” on Earth:
 - Practice the “3 Rs”: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.
 - Compost yard and food waste to replenish the soil.
 - Reduce your dependence on cars and other fuel-inefficient vehicles.
 - Replace dangerous chemical pesticides with natural alternatives.
 - Weatherize your homes to save energy; use energy-efficient lighting and appliances.
 - Conserve and protect water resources.
 - Plant trees.

RESOURCES ON ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

WEB SITES

- * **The HCIJO site** <www.holycrossjustice.org> has a special section of resources related to sustainability and other topics covered in this issue of *Perspectives*.
- * **The Earth Charter Initiative site** <www.earthcharter.org> provides a variety of resources:
 - the text of the *Earth Charter* in 30 languages and downloadable brochures in French, Spanish, Portuguese and English;
 - ideas for implementing the *Earth Charter* in your personal life and civic community;
 - programs for use in educational institutions at all levels and in informal education settings;
 - a program for involving your civic community in the work of the *Earth Charter*.
- * **The Sacred Balance web site** <www.sacredbalance.com> provides *The Sacred Balance* curriculum guides, columns by the Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki, environmental news, and the Nature Challenge.
- * **The Learning for a Sustainable Future site** <www.schoolnet.ca/learning/> (English and French) provides a variety of resources to help educators integrate the concepts and principles of sustainable development into curricula at all levels.

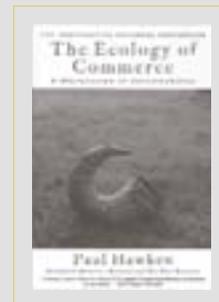
VIDEOS

- * **The Sacred Balance** television series (four episodes, one hour each)
 - *Journey into New Worlds*: In the opening episode, David Suzuki begins a personal journey – an exploration of science and spirit that rediscovers the human place in nature.

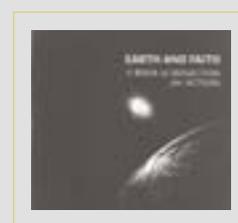
- *The Matrix of Life*: David Suzuki travels around the world, exploring our intimate relationship with water and air and is introduced to the Hindu worldview that sees water, air and all life on Earth as part of a matrix.
- *The Fire of Creation*: All life on Earth is forged in the furnace of the sun, and throughout the ages, human beings have revered this sacred flame. In this episode, David discovers that the findings of science amplify that reverence.
- *Coming Home*: Home is with our “family.” But our family is far larger than we realize. We’re at home in the human community and in the biosphere, close relatives of every living thing. We are all creatures of the living Earth.

These videos (available in VHS and PAL) may be borrowed free of charge from the HCIJO Resource Library (e-mail: kmedley@cscsisters.org; fax: 574-284-5596).

- ★ *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*, Paul Hawken, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, New York, 1993.

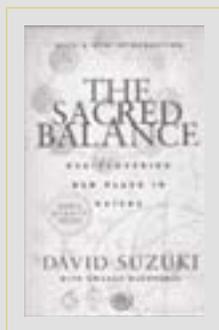


- ★ *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*, United Nations Environment Program, New York, New York, available at www.earthprint.com.

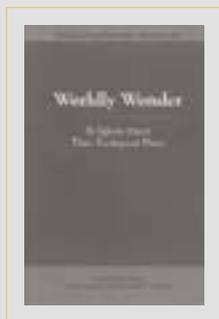


BOOKS

- ★ *The Sacred Balance: Recovering Our Place in Nature*, David Suzuki, Douglas and McIntyre Publishing Group, Vancouver, British Columbia – Canada, 2002.



- ★ *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Open Court Books, Chicago, Illinois, 2003.



Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of those who are destitute.
Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and the needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9



In Christianity, for example, such a transformation might mean an expanded/deepened sense of incarnation, from which may emerge a far richer sacramental theology and a more encompassing Christology embracing the Cosmic Christ of the universe.

Tucker repeatedly asserts the need for pluralistic approaches to environmental problems: “No one religious tradition or discipline will be sufficient in the search for a more comprehensive and culturally inclusive global environmental ethics.” In fact, she believes there is great potential for explicitly focusing interreligious dialogue on the ecological crisis. After several decades of conversation, religions seem ready to move beyond discussions of dogma to cooperative work on behalf of both the human and natural communities.

This brief but powerful book challenges all religious persons. Clearly we cannot stand by as silent, inactive witnesses to a sixth great extinction on Earth — one for which humans are the primary cause. We must find our ecological voice. As Tucker asserts, Earth and its species are crying out. Earth calls to be seen as the source of life, not a resource to be used at will or commodity to be bought and sold. The species beg humans to join the great community of life forms, not stand apart.

All religions, Tucker concludes, remind us that we are part of Earth, that Earth bears, nurtures and cares for us. The only proper response — the only *religious* response — is gratitude for this gift of all life: “wonder and awe in the face

of this mystery of existence, restraint and respect while partaking of its gift, and . . . responsibility to future generations for its continuity.” ■

Joan Quinn, a Sister of Holy Cross, is a retired teacher with experience at all levels of education — from elementary school to university to adult faith education. She is currently the regional animator and mission director of the English Canadian region.



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