



## Weaving Abundance: The Good Life Restored

Welcome to this first in a series of reflections on various aspects of *Sumak Kawsay* - *Living Well, Living Well Together!* Produced by the HCIJO Ecological Economics Working Group, each booklet will explore an aspect of what it means to live well: to live harmoniously within ourselves, among ourselves, and with the entire vast community of Earth. We hope that you will find these booklets helpful for both individual and communal reflection and useful in your ministries.



*Sumak Kawsay* is also sometimes translated as “the good life,” a phrase which, in today’s global society, has multiple connotations. We invite you to pause for a few moments and reflect on ideas and images “the good life” brings up for you.

- *What messages does your present culture send about the nature of “the good life”? How is “the good life” portrayed – in advertising, films, electronic media, social media? Do you find yourself influenced by this messaging, perhaps without even realizing it?*
- *Has your culture’s vision of “the good life” changed over time? If so, in what ways? What influences have brought about this change?*
- *What is your personal vision of what is essential for “the good life”?*



# What's at the heart of "the good life"?

## What truly makes life rich and worth living?



Different cultures answer that question quite differently. The globally dominant Western perspective tends to view the good life largely in terms of economic prosperity – having more and more resources to accumulate more and more things.

But other diverse cultures see relationship and connection, especially with one another, at the core of the good life. Obviously, everyone needs adequate resources to live, but in these cultures intimacy, friendship, and community are much more significant markers of wealth - in fact, of *humanness*. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the South African spirit of *ubuntu*:

*Ubuntu* speaks of the essence of being human....We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'a person is a person through other people.' It is not, 'I think, therefore I am.' It says, 'I am human because I belong.' I participate, I share.... . *Walk Out, Walk On* (p. 81-2)

This spirit of *ubuntu* resonates well with our own Catholic "culture" – our theological tradition and our contemporary self-understanding as Christians. As theologian Ilia Delio writes in *The Emergent Christ*:

The reign of God preached by Jesus meant a new consciousness..., a consciousness of relatedness, inclusivity, non-duality and community....

Those who follow Jesus are to be healthy whole-makers.... A healthy life for a healthy cosmos requires receptivity, openness, and compassionate love that reaches across the lines of difference and accepts the other as part of oneself because together we are one in this cosmic body of Christ. (p. 63, 146)

➤ *Where are you most challenged in being a "healthy whole-maker"?*





## Has individualism jeopardized our social fabric?

## Can we weave communities that restore connections?

Highly individualized Western culture has come to treat community as an amenity - “nice,” perhaps, but hardly essential. As Charles Eisenstein writes in *Sacred Economics*, under Western influence, life for many has become a private affair, producing entire societies of disconnection and deepening loneliness:

We are uncomfortable with intimacy and connection, which are among the greatest of our unmet needs today. To be truly seen and heard, to be truly known is a deep human need. Our hunger for it is so omnipresent...that we no more know what we are missing than a fish knows it is wet. ...we seek solace and sustenance in the closest available substitutes: television, shopping, [...] conspicuous consumption.... (p. 424)

How do we weave communities that satisfy such hungers and restore a sense of belonging? Eisenstein says genuine community is woven from gifts: not superficial monetized gifts, but gifts that meet real physical and spiritual human needs. When gifts meet real needs, not constructed wants, they birth deep gratitude, trust and interdependence. Genuine gifts bind people together. Giving and receiving such gifts, they come to know that they need one another and can rely on each other. They awaken to the abundance that is theirs.

- *What barriers or obstacles keep us disconnected from each other?*
- *What do you see as our deepest human needs?*
- *How can you more genuinely be “gift” for others?*

Around the world, such “abundant communities” are discovering that shared gifts and mutual commitment also provide footing for social change.

**Uganda:** A group infected with HIV began a revolving loan fund to support themselves and one another. Each new member contributes a communally determined amount of money and then becomes eligible for low-interest small business loans. At the end of each year, participants share the interest collected when loans are repaid. The fund has not only provided much needed capital but also grown self-esteem and social development of the entire community.

**Peru:** Co-workers decided to spend one rest period each week reflecting on their responsibility to Earth and all creation. As a result they realized how seriously their own

company was contaminating the environment and jointly convinced management to hire an ecologically conscious waste-management firm.

**South Bend, IN (USA):** A nurse one day realized that poverty in her area was as much a hunger for community and hope as for sustenance. She began talking with local residents and homeless people about gardening a vacant lot near the city's downtown. What started as a way for local people to learn about and obtain nutritious foods has since grown into a collaborative social network operating 50 gardens and providing nourishment, empowerment, and education through a spirit of "unconditional sharing."

Joined to each another, ordinary people like these are realizing they actually have the power to be the architects of their own future. What future will *you* and your abundant community build?

- *How has this reflection enriched your vision of "the good life"?*
- *What will you carry away from this reflection?*
- *How will you live differently?*

### Resources for further reflection:

#### BOOKS

**The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods.** McKnight, John and Peter Block. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2010.

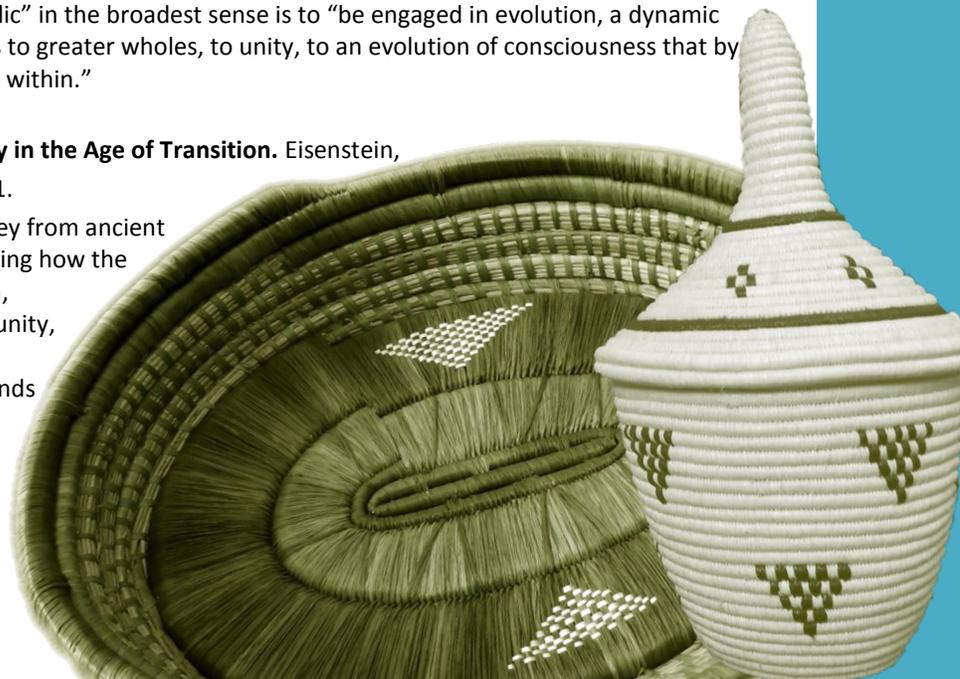
The consumer society constantly tells us we are insufficient and must purchase what we need from specialists and systems outside our community. *The Abundant Community* shows how community-based self-organizing structures focusing on sharing of gifts, hospitality, and inclusivity can meet those needs, reweave our social fabric, and create a future that works for all.

**The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe.** Delio, Ilia. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

In *The Emergent Christ*, author Ilia Delio re-envisioned God, the mission of Jesus, and the Christ in light of cosmic evolution. She concludes that to be "catholic" in the broadest sense is to "be engaged in evolution, a dynamic presence of relatedness with God that leads to greater wholes, to unity, to an evolution of consciousness that by its very nature enables God to be born from within."

**Sacred Economics: Money, Gift, and Society in the Age of Transition.** Eisenstein, Charles. Berkeley, CA: Evolver Editions, 2011.

*Sacred Economics* traces the history of money from ancient gift economies to modern capitalism, revealing how the money system has contributed to alienation, competition, and scarcity, destroyed community, and necessitated endless growth. Today, Eisenstein argues, these trends have reached their extreme and are beginning to collapse, creating great



opportunity for transition to a more connected, ecological, and sustainable way of being. This book is available free online at <http://sacred-economics.com/read-online/>.

**Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now.** Wheatley, Margaret and Deborah Frieze. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2011. *Walk Out Walk On* invites you on a learning journey to seven communities around the world to meet people who have walked out of limiting beliefs and assumptions and walked on to create healthy and resilient communities. These “Walk Outs” who “Walk On” use their ingenuity and caring to figure out how to work with what they have to create what they need, demonstrating that all communities have the intelligence and inventiveness to solve their seemingly insolvable problems.

## FILMS

**The Economics of Happiness** (International version). Dir Steven Gorelick, John Page, and Helena Norberg Hodge. ISEC, 2011.

While some aspects of globalization have undeniably brought gifts, *economic* globalization has worsened almost every problem we face - accelerating climate change, destroying jobs, fraying the fabric of our communities and adding stress to our work and personal lives. *The Economics of Happiness* demonstrates that there *is* a simple, rewarding, systemic alternative to corporate globalization. “Going local” is the way to repair our fractured world – our ecosystems, our societies and our very selves. (65 minutes; audio: English, subtitles: English, Español, Français, Deutsch)

**Happy.** Dir Roko Belic. Wadi Rum Films, 2011.

*HAPPY* takes us on a journey from the swamps of Louisiana to the slums of Kolkata in search of what really makes people happy. Combining real life stories of people from around the world and powerful interviews with the leading scientists in happiness research, *HAPPY* explores the secret behind our most valued emotion – deep connections with self, others, and the broader community of life. (75 minutes; audio: English, subtitles: Bengali, French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Spanish)

## Interested in these resources?

DVDs may be borrowed free of charge from the Justice Resource Library (e-mail:

[dtaylor@cscsisters.org](mailto:dtaylor@cscsisters.org);

phone: 574-284-5500;

fax: 574-284-5596.)





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