I. Description of process: Scoping defines context, identifies function and integrates Life’s Principles

Clearly describe the topic you chose and the question you arrived at to guide the work of your Ecotone group. Briefly explain how you arrived at your question, as well as the context, criteria and constraints you considered. Identify which Life Principles guided your work. What are the connections to spirituality, IHM tradition/legacy?

Poverty Ecotone Group: Our Question; Context and Function; Other Connections

Our topic is poverty. This focus of concern garnered very significant support in responses to the IHM Community Survey Question (to relate our finances to local impact) and again in the 2016 Summer Days. This concern carries forward the explicit IHM commitment that dates from the early 1970s and is central to our IHM charism and history.

From the inception of our Ecotone group, our members frequently brought in Resources for other group members to read, to know about or to find on-line. This practice continued throughout our work. By the way, many of the vital resources we used through the steps of our learning and as cited in this report will be available for you on the IHM website or in takeaways from this meeting.

After some initial exchange on the Biomimicry model, we generated the following focus question: How, as global citizens, might IHMs embrace a “living economy for a living earth” as part of the movement to eliminate poverty in all its forms?” We found the phrase from David Korten “living economy for a living earth” helpful as shorthand for the upending needed for a new worldview and true systems change.

The Biomimicry model then calls for identifying the context, criteria and constraints that will likely influence our efforts. Our session on this exercise was generally helpful in alerting us to the ways we individually understand (1) elements of systemic change; (2) poverty and all its forms; and (3) frameworks in which institutional or group strategies of change would occur. On the whole however, this exercise seemed somewhat abstract and distant and had limited value for us, perhaps because it was at too early a point in our work together. It occurred before we had explored our topic thoroughly, and before we had ideas.
In this initial period we did not explore as a group nor concretely invoke any of the six adaptive strategies of the Biomimicry model. However, the one overarching life principle, “life creates conditions conducive to life” did have clear appeal, and was referenced on occasion in our discussions. This principle was evocative for us, signaling the overall direction in which we were moving and a broad criterion for evaluating as we moved forward. Then we began the work of unfolding the big topic of our question. Our first deep dive was with the word itself: “poverty.” Poverty is an always present reality in our local places, our national life and our globalized world. We agreed we wanted to deepen our understanding of factors that cause poverty (economically, politically, socially and culturally) and examine the focus and effect of various strategies to address poverty in systemic ways.

But the poverty we see and can describe in its many manifestations is not the only reality. So we had to reframe. Poverty is only part, or half, of the picture. The other half is immense concentrations of wealth in our globalized world. Poverty is just the underside of those concentrations, the result of systems, policies and practices that create and keep the imbalance in place.

Understanding poverty and speaking of it accurately, we came to reframe it as inequality. This re-framing was not a small step for us, nor would it be for you, because it forces us to address the whole picture and to include the power interests and arrangements that keep poverty in place and that are connected to our human ways of living, our institutions, our priorities, our choices.

II. **Key Findings from Your Research – Discovery**

*Through what lenses did your group examine the topic? What did your group discover in terms of potential actions or ideas related to your question?*

The process of our work was very organic in being open, consensual and following an associational and unfolding type of logic. We used five lenses to delve into our topic. The first lens, Reframing as Inequality, we have described already. It occurred early in our conversations as we shaped our framework question. The remaining four lenses include Global Growth Goals, Local Impact, Resources and Incendence Practices.

**Global Goals**

For a second lens of discovery we used the *Global Goals for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations. The global goals were launched in September 2015 by 193 world leaders resolved to focus new attention, energy and resources on ending extreme poverty, inequality and climate change by 2030.
The goals mince no words: Goal #1 is NO POVERTY...End poverty in all its forms everywhere. The year target is 2030...: Zero hunger, Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation: Affordable and Clean Energy; Decent Work; the Benefits of Economic Growth.....

“BUT, BUT, BUT...that’s everything...” we hear you saying. And yes, you are right, it is everything. And the goals go on....Sustainable Cities, Responsible Consumption; Protections and Fostering of life on land and below water; Strong Institutions for the Common Good. There are 17 Goals and 169 specific targets in the UN Global Goals. All of them relate directly or by clear implication to poverty in its many forms.

**Learning and Acting for Local Impact**

A third lens was that of Local Impact. This is an ongoing concern and feature of how IHMs relate to our places of life and ministry. IHMs want to know and impact the local picture of inequality and disparity where they are located. There are many examples, and each member of our group- -whether in Monroe city or county, in neighborhoods of Detroit, or in other major cities - - could speak from that present awareness.

As one instance, we noted that recently River House examined the indices of poverty for Monroe city and county in materials from the Monroe County Opportunity Program. River House then wove that data into its program of study on Francis’ 2013 Exhortation, Joy of the Gospel. This type of “local impact” awareness can guide our personal and group choices, our way of living, our voting and advocacy, and our community engagements with our neighbors in our local places.

**Resource Sharing**

Our third lens in the discovery process was noting the many resources we were finding for examining our question. We collected and annotated these resources and put together an All-in One-Resource page for continuing study, reading, research and prayer. It was just a drop in the bucket of what’s available to be sure, but it will keep us busy for some time. Some of these resources are with Biomimicry sites so that we develop and strengthen our capacities of curiosity, observation and location-specific knowledge.

Other resources were new economic and cultural studies, selected daily reports, and popular education tools for understanding what has happened and is occurring in changing in world incomes in the past quarter century. In economic analyses we see that global north and global south are somewhat closer together but that disparities within national boundaries have increased. This reality has given rise to Brexit, Trump, Bernie, anti-immigrant backlash, and efforts of global elites to protect wealth, harness the flows of capital, and develop new strategies of accumulation.
Inscendence Practices

We also started some new practices as a group, our fifth lens. We call them “inscendence practices,” following the writings of Thomas Berry. In these practices we consciously work to regain an attunement to earth that we have lost. We used our prayer and reflection time in each meeting for these practices, usually about an hour.

To deepen our understanding of Berry’s notion of “inscendence” we read an interpretive essay by eco-psychologist and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin on this aspect of Thomas Berry’s work and teaching. In many places in his writings Berry observes that humanity has lost deep attunement to the natural world. He urges us to re-enter the earth, regain the genetic imperatives that our industrial, technology-enhanced way of life has taken out of us and that is needed to assist us to surrender to the pull of earth’s dream. Berry calls this process “awakening the spontaneities of our being.”

We have devised and experienced four such practices that we can share here briefly.

First, storytelling of a memory from childhood. This was simply done with a round robin of careful telling and attentive listening to stories that touch back to our childhood sense of the whole. Keen and precise detail was mixed in the recounts, often a multi-sensory engagement - - “I felt, I could smell, I lifted up and held, I touched, I saw...” as well as words of joy and exclamation. Narration of early life stories of this type often carry the root basis of our feeling with the natural world. We were able to capture these stories in a simple way.

Secondly we used the Spiral of the Work that Reconnects from master teacher and spiritual leader, Joanna Macy. We choose to do the second step of four in her spiral exercise, honoring our pain for the world. Again, a round robin of quiet stories with images, sounds, feelings and, often, tears - - signaling a deep sense of connection and vulnerability.

In a third moment, we shared “the We’s” of our lives...our biological family lines, parents and siblings, class groups, friends, parishes, neighborhoods, local places of life, and bio-region location....to see ourselves in the nested holarchies of our lives. We are autonomous wholes at one level and, at the same time, part of something larger. Our social worlds were the easiest, and speaking of our species location in the natural world is growing in all of us.

Finally in a fourth practice, not yet complete, we will write together a Found Poem following Mary Oliver’s example in her poem titled Gratitude. In this piece Oliver offers and answers eight questions. She uses lively and precise description based in perceptive observation. We hope to each share our phrases and words of observation and
description from a reflective time out of doors. From those sharings before our work is ended we hope to construct together a Found Poem.

Yet other ways of extending these inscende practices might be found in developing guides for outdoor contemplative time. The goal of these tools would be to strengthen our capacities of curiosity, observation, imagination and location-specific knowledge. In short we intend that a resource titled *Tools for Transformation* will gather these inscendence practices, some simple guides for outdoor contemplation and introduce one valuable popular education resource to complete this phase of our work.

As an example of the different kind of attunement to the natural world that such practices encourage we share the poem *Lost* by David Wagoner, poet of the Pacific Northwest. Wagoner writes:

**LOST**

*Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you*
*Aren't lost. Wherever you are is called Here,*
*And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,*
*Must ask permission to know it and be known.*
*The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,*
*I have made this place around you.*
*If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.*
*No two trees are the same to Raven.*
*No two branches are the same to Wren.*
*If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,*
*You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows*
*Where you are. You must let it find you.*


The attunement reflected in this text comes from a wholly different consciousness that has re-joined the natural world at a deep level, and is receptive to the re-awakened “spontaneities of our being.” These spontaneities will assist us over time in building and supporting a sustainable human culture with humanly-scaled local regenerative economies for a living earth.

**III. What Idea Does Your Group Wish to Move Forward? - Design**

*Identify the who, why, what, where and when of your idea.*

The Poverty Ecotone group is ready to move forward the idea *Tools for Transformation.* The highest priority identified in the 228 IHM community responses to the December 2016 survey about next steps for the community to continue to deepen our ecological
consciousness and commitment to sustainability was education that connects the dots. 

**Tools for Transformation** is a response to this request.

Is it a coincidence that the third paragraph of the prayer for Assembly/Chapter expresses our desire for transformation? “…Called to transformation, we desire to take a long, loving look at where we are, the world, and the future that beckons us.”

Our process, as an Ecotone Group looking at the issue of poverty, invited us to discover and to experience “inscendence.” We also gathered local and global data on poverty and considered the impact poverty has on people and the whole Earth community. This experience and our awareness that “Life creates conditions conducive to life” convinced us it is essential we pair inscendence practice with cognitive learning if we desire transformation.

Inscendence: Thomas Berry identified the loss of humankind’s pre-rational, intuitive way of viewing reality as causal for the radical changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution and pursued since then by the quest for greater production, profit and greed. He recognized the consequences of humankind believing we are separate from, and superior to, creation rather than part of it. For Berry, this was the tragic flaw in the Western approach to life on this planet.

Berry introduced or better, reminded us, of what indigenous people have always known: we are part of, members of a “community” and, as such, engage with, learn from, depend upon, revere and thrive because of the whole community of life. In order to make ourselves available to the wisdom of other members of this great community, Westerners need to “enter into” / “listen to” / be available to the “teaching/wisdom” in them. Poets do this, some very well. For example, Mary Oliver, convinced nature has profound wisdom and instruction to share, has turned to it all her life.

Taking the stance of a seeker, that is one who welcomes into one’s very core the mystery being contemplated, is engaging in the practice of inscendence. This is a practice we hope will move forward in the life of IHMs.

**WHO:** The first audience for **Tools for Transformation** is the IHM community. Our expectation is that these tools will also serve others, for example, employees, Monroe community, those to whom we minister and other interested groups. This is an invitational moment. While all are welcome not all will choose to engage. We will provide ways to connect/ support those who participate.

**SENSE OF PLACE:** Choosing to locate the IHM congregation on the River Raisin seems to have been a Spirit-inspired decision made by co-founders Theresa Maxis Duchemin and Louis Florent Gillet. We know water is essential to all life and the beauty of creation is made more visible with the presence of water. Waterways connect people. They are
routes for getting food and other resources to residents living along their shores. In 1845, the River Raisin and Lake Erie were unpolluted; fish were abundant; people living in the River Raisin Watershed had clean water to drink and bathe. Water sustained the lives of the people in the entire basin. Besides being a means of transporting people and/or goods, these bodies of water allowed for the delivery of news, medicines, teachers and preachers. Water enriched the quality of life for those inhabiting the area. The waters of the Great Lakes have sustained the lives of the people and communities in western Lake Erie Basin since time immemorial. Water in its various forms was a blessing and, as such, reverenced and loved.

Sadly, the lakes and rivers of our bio-region have not always been so reverenced. Over the last hundred plus years, industrial production, expediency and profit became the dominant priorities. Our waters are treated as an expendable and exploitable resource. A lamentable result has been the declining health of our rivers, streams and lakes due to sewage, waste from factories, paper mills and companies and chemical spills. Nutrient and sediment runoff from farms and fertilizer from residents’ lawns have added to the pollution of our water commons. These practices turned the River Raisin and Lake Erie watersheds from “living waters” to “impaired bodies of water” negatively impacting the communities of all species whose health is intertwined with the health of our waters. Thankfully, states, provinces, nations and Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes region are collectively working on behalf of these waters and future generations to restore, protect and preserve the health of our land and water.

IHMs know this place is our foundation, our specific place within the United States, the world, Earth and the universe. It is our hope that rooted in this sense of place we continue to move forward our commitment to “see with new eyes” the life and beauty of the Great Lakes bioregion and her invitation to act for the good of the whole.

**WHY:** Throughout our history, in prayer, word and action, the IHM community has lived our commitment to the liberating mission of Jesus in light of the needs of the times. At this time in history it is imperative that all of humanity embrace the reality noted in the Preamble to the Earth Charter: “we are one human family, one Earth community, with a common destiny.”

IHMS have been growing in Ecological Consciousness. We acknowledge and celebrate the hundreds of women in the IHM community who, through their ministry, life choices, activism, initiative, ongoing learning and desire for transformation, witness to a personal commitment to grow in ecological consciousness and living global sustainability.
Some of the commitments and actions of the IHM community that demonstrate this growth include:

- 1972 Affirmation 10 we recognized and articulated our call to work with others to eradicate the causes of injustice and oppression, and to help create structures that promote justice and peace and bring unity among all peoples.

- 1987 Assembly reaffirmed IHM commitment to Affirmation 10 with the introduction, “In the spirit of Affirmation 10 and with the growing sense of the interdependence and unity of all creation as central to an emerging world view we feel compelled to…”

- 1988 Leadership Team commissioned ecological audit of Monroe campus and establishes the Environment Committee.

- 1994 Chapter - Eco-Justice Enactment -“IHMs, as members of the planetary community, recognize and respect the sacredness and interdependence of all creation. We are aware that when we lose the reverence for and awe of creation as well as an understanding of our place as partners within the earth community, our sense of God and of ourselves is diminished. Therefore: the participants of Chapter ‘94 commit themselves and call the IHM Congregation to continue to develop and act out of an ecological consciousness, individually and corporately.”

- Theological Education Project offered a study packet on Science and the New Cosmology.

- 1998 St. Mary Organic Farm was launched and the commitment continues today.

- The Eco-Justice Office and newsletter was established in this period.

- 1999 Leadership Council accepted the Monroe Campus Long Range Master Plan (MCLRMP) discernment group’s recommendation of the Integrating Idea which included sustainability as the overarching construct for the Motherhouse and campus renovation.

- 2000 Chapter committed to build sustainable community and affirmed the Monroe Campus Long Range Plan including the Integrating Idea.

- 2001 Justice Peace and Sustainability Office was established.

- 2003 Leadership Council established the River Raisin Institute to educate the general public regarding sustainable community.
2004 the IHM Community takes a corporate stance and endorses the Earth Charter. This act served as a concrete indicator of our commitment to both live sustainably and deepen our ecological consciousness.

2012 Chapter Statement reads “We commit ourselves to... living sustainably as we explore our place in an evolving universe.”

2016 IHMs give attention to Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’” and the reception of it around the world.

WHAT: We will begin with two tools mentioned earlier in this report as *Tools for Transformation*.

1. *From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition* is a document made available by Movement Generation in Oakland, CA. This free booklet, available in English and Spanish, is from their Justice and Ecology Project. We see it as an excellent resource to help IHMs and others deepen their understanding of what it means to embrace a “living economy for a living earth”. Our intention is to offer a variety of ways to introduce, use and share this tool.

2. Inscedence Practices – We will prepare a booklet and online resource of the inscendence practices we have used. This resource will build on Thomas Berry’s thoughts about the need for humans to remake ourselves as a species in order to build a sustainable human culture.

OTHER IDEAS: We also hope to move forward two other ideas that we have not had time to consider in any depth. These are:

- Look at congregational decision making in light of the Poverty Ecotone Group question with particular attention to local impact. What might be the impact if we connected with others interested in strengthening Monroe’s local economy?

- Join with the Food Ecotone Group and with those in the Monroe community who are poor or have low incomes, to listen, learn, explore and support/develop specific projects that contribute to growing an equitable, sustainable and peaceful community. Examples might include funding plots in the IHM Community Garden, Urban Agriculture for food security, etc.

It is possible something may emerge from the May discernment meeting that includes these ideas. It is also possible that some Ecotone participants will want to continue working to bring some of the ideas to fruition.
WHEN: Once we see what emerges from the May 2017 Ecotone Groups discernment meeting we will have a better sense of a timeline. We expect we could have something ready by late fall.

IV. Moving Your Idea Forward

*What might be the impact on current systems and structures? What new systems or structures may be needed to implement your idea?*

- The IHM community is invited to broader and deeper thinking about the whole and our interconnectedness. This could require a change in structure of meetings to allow time to reflect on key questions related to IHM mission and commitments and how they are reflected in specific decisions. It could also include inviting other voices into the conversation, those who have relevant insight, ideas, experience, etc.

- We will need to open to the bigger reality that we are part of the Monroe community and decisions we make related to resources impact the local community in a positive or negative way.

- We will need to be intentional in reaching out to those who are poor or have low incomes to learn what they want for their communities and what they are engaged in to make a difference. Discover who and what is working and be part of a coalition that is community led.

- Make use of Biomimicry as a tool to discover what may be helpful structural changes within the IHM organization. One example could be communications.

- Look at how IHM decisions related to fund raising, publicity, management contracts and purchasing policies, etc. allow for or limit the expression of IHM commitments.

- Introduce inscendence practices to those we employ.

V. Identify Resources

*What human and financial resources will be needed? Who might be your allies to bring your idea to life?*

The financial resources needed will be somewhat minimal, probably around $3,000, in the first year. In the beginning we anticipate costs associated with printing and with hosting meetings and presentations. Allies who might help bring our ideas to life include the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office, Sustainable Campus Planning Office, River Raisin Institute, IHM community members as well as local Monroe community interested in the topic.
VI. Evaluate and envision the implementation of your idea. – Evaluation

*Review your design. Is there something missing? What is the timeline for implementation? Who would be involved?*

We believe our design is good. We need to develop further the other ideas we wish to move forward. We expect to have something ready by late fall 2017.

VII. How did biomimicry (using nature as a mentor, model and measure) help guide you through this process?

As a working group, our use of the Biomimicry model is at an early point. In addition our efforts are in the field of “social innovation” which has a different type of specificity or concreteness than the fields of engineering, architecture, design, agronomy, robotics or computing. These latter are some of the fields in which Biomimicry first flourished.

In our instance, we are utilizing the model to assist the effort of the members of a religious community with a vibrant history and heritage who are working to deepen and broaden our understanding and commitment to sustainability in context of 21st century challenges and needs. Further, most of us in the Ecotone groups are living and working in habitats of the Great Lakes bio-region in older urban cityscapes in post-industrial areas of the country. We believe that none of these “details of location” are insignificant for the use of this model.

Our limited experience as a work group suggests that use of the model has great promise. But it is a difficult model to step into. We share here five points about our experience in using the model.

1. Our group learning has strongly reinforced the need to find ways to deepen processes and have effective practices that foster change in personal consciousness. Over time, possibly even if named as “generational time”, we believe we can “become native” to the places we inhabit.

2. We recognize that we are experiencing transformation that will bring shifts in our insight and living, and thus to our ways of being and doing in the human communities where we live and work.

3. This change falls under the notion of nature as mentor, whereby the natural world deeply teaches us in our way of knowing and learning. (One writer, Henry Dicks, calls this aspect the epistemic aspect, related to our knowing and our way of acquiring knowledge. The same writer suggests that nature as model is the “poetic” aspect (or the self-organizing/self-authoring/self-producing aspect), and nature as measure is the ethical aspect, a standard for assessing the “rightness” or “the fit” of actions and choices.)
4. For groups involved in social innovation perhaps some of the steps of the model are not in the best order. For us, doing context, criteria and constraints was “too early” in our process. Essentially we did the three Cs only on the “bare question” we had generated before we had surfaced ideas to explore the question, let alone to realize how the question exists concretely as a functional need in social groups.

5. The notion of function in the Biomimicry model might also be called “need” or “what is to be accomplished.” Then, bringing agreed upon words or phrases that state a functional need into a search (such as Ask Nature) might more rapidly become a productive approach for the group as a whole.

6. Bridging from natural models and abstracting biological strategies seems to be the most difficult step, especially if a group as a whole has a paucity of useful knowledge about the local terrain and local species life. Time and method is needed to build up familiarity so that the process of abstracting biological strategies and bridging across from natural models to social contexts begins to make sense and occurs more easily, more organically.

7. On the whole, the length of time we had together as a group to work the biomimicry model was insufficient to strongly experience its guiding value for its use for social innovation. As we end this phase of our work, nature as mentor stands out as an approach that re-engaged our energy and seemed to move us “out of our heads.”

**VIII. In what other ways might the community use biomimicry to revitalize our commitment to sustainability?**

The community might Biomimicry as a tool to discover what may be helpful structural changes within the IHM organization. One example could be communications.

**Poverty Ecotone Group Members**

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