

**Deepening and Broadening Our Commitment to Sustainability
Through the Lens of Biomimicry: A Community Process
Final Report
Food Awareness and Education around Food Choices**

Our initial question, after meeting briefly on Sept. 29, 2016 was: “How do we raise our consciousness about the impact of food choices on ourselves and the whole Earth community?”

Through reflection and discussion, we came to realize that our question was too broad and needed to lead us to action in regard to making better and different food choices and promoting changes in lifestyles that would allow this to occur. We also must include *the “why”* this is important to the Earth community.

There is great relevance in our individual histories, experiences and perspectives around food. Knowing, for example, health needs, diet concerns, different cultural beliefs and practices, the view from agro-business and production and how these affect our food choices will affect our question and the paths we take to ascertain information through research and discussion.

Pope Francis, in his message for World Food Day, affirmed the need to go to the root of the impact of climate change to investigate how to consume differently and act politically, leading to lifestyle change, systemic change and equitable distribution.

With all of this in mind, we revised the question: “How do we raise our consciousness about the impact of our food choices leading to the transformation of the global food system for the benefit of the whole Earth community?”

Then, while evaluating our design, we revisited the question and changed it to a strong statement: “Our food choices do impact Earth. We will raise consciousness collectively and individually about the impact of our food choices, leading to the transformation of the global food system for the benefit of the whole earth community.”

Using life principles, core IHM values and mapping tools in the context of the IHM community, we began to look at how to bring awareness and education of our statement into the various groups and committees in which we as individuals meet and function and what specific constraints we might encounter. We desire to approach our education through the lens of spirituality, examining food as Eucharist, the grace encounter, our gratitude for abundance and for the gift of considering less as part of this abundance.

Our research was guided in a two-fold direction. First, what impacts our food choices and secondly, how our food choices impact Earth. Each group member researched a particular food or food group that led us to our “Food Stories.” The stories included what impacts our food choices, such as adult behavior, personal eating patterns, institutional purchasing, agri-business, advertising and marketing, climate and climate changes, soil conditions, politics, labeling and regulations. They also focused on the how our food choices impact such things as health, pesticide and herbicide uses,

food workers and wages and working conditions, ground water and soil conservation and erosion and food waste.

Implementation of our statement has to do with raising consciousness about the impact of food choices, both individually and collectively and our target audience is the IHM community. We do not see a need for inventing any new structures or processes in order to do this. We believe that we can best bring new awareness to the SSIHM community by working with existing committees, departments, events and structures.

Our primary goal is to foster education and dialogue within the IHM community (both personally and corporately) regarding our food choices and how they affect the whole Earth community. We would then move outward into our extended communities.

We would like to begin by writing an article each month for *IHM Connections* as a way of sharing some of the important information we have already gleaned through our research. We would ask the IHM Congregational Library to display and highlight print and audiovisual resources that could be made available for education around food issues. Additionally, we would share food-related resources and action alerts via the weekly IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Announcement.

Then, we would like to initiate a dialogue with the IHM Sustainable Campus Planning Office and Campus Dining Services regarding our current food service contract at the Motherhouse. We would explore possible changes within the current structure that would allow for more sustainable food choices and practices in the Motherhouse Dining Room and for community events held at the Motherhouse.

We would also like to work with the Events Planning Office and Campus Greening Team to evaluate the Green Meeting Guidelines, which are used by other groups holding meetings and events on the IHM campus in order to incorporate recommendations for more sustainable food choices by these groups.

Finally, we would like to continue having conversations with the IHM Responsible Investment Committee regarding possibilities for engagement with those food companies in which there are IHM investments. We have made an initial move toward this with a recent petition signing at the Community Earth Day Celebration held in April. The petition regarding the uses of palm oil by the Nestle Company was forwarded the committee.

As part of envisioning the implementation of our statement, we realize the need for ongoing evaluation. Using a variety of evaluation tools will allow us to consider how best to implement our design over time both personally and communally. Evaluation might also enhance awareness and participation in IHM community events relevant to our statement, for example a display of materials at Assemble/Chapter in July 2017.

As we began our work as an ecotone group we engaged biomimicry in formulating our question, looking at how our group would function in terms of shared leadership and adapting our thinking as we investigated the topic of food choices and

the impact these choices made on the whole Earth community and taking advantage of available resources.

As in a flock of geese, we traded locations within the group to best use our strengths and needed times of process and so at times each individual assumed roles of facilitation, note-taking, leading prayer, etc. We created food webs to help clarify our thinking and used these models to guide our work. In writing our “food stories,” we investigated the different models nature uses to produce efficiently and with least resistance and harm to the whole. For example, as nature takes advantage of periods of rest in the cycle of seasons, humans have learned to let land fallow and rotate crop planting to allow for regeneration of nutrients, and how areas of Earth – rainforests, deserts, valleys, etc., shift and change with elements of weather. Our good friend the hermit crab takes advantage of what might be considered refuse or waste to accommodate its housing needs; we too can use and reuse materials, ideas and research to bring forth new plans and perspectives.

Using biomimicry has led us to change our question to our present statement. If, through the process we engaged in over the past year, we take what we observe and recognize in nature to evaluate and judge and then act, employing what has been learned, our food choices can guide us to responsible use and care of Earth. Making changes in our own behavior can then be models for others with whom we interact.

While as an Ecotone group, our focus too, is the IHM community here in Monroe, this project has taken on a new focus of awareness in light of land use and food production in the farming communities around the world. It calls for consciousness of shared Earth as we communicated with others as to what we as Food Group have learned through our months of work. As part of the larger Ecotone group, we are interested in joining forces with the other Ecotone groups to allow our ideas and projects to move forward. And, so truly in full solidarity with the whole of Earth, we raise our individual awareness employing education that we can use to connect with other groups.

Currently, the community is involved in reflection centering around our patrimony. Employing biomimicry may help us to engage in this discussion and action needed with different eyes. We could explore how we might use biomimicry in making decisions, both individually and corporately in committees and projects in the future.