Background

In the spring of 2015 Sharon McNeil announced her decision to retire from her position as IHM ecology director, a position that included St. Mary Organic Farm (SMOF). Mission Councilor Sister Mary Ann Bredice called together a group comprised of IHM Sisters, Associates and staff to consider the value of this work and to make a recommendation to the Leadership Council regarding SMOF.

The consulting group met three times. At the first meeting, the group expressed affirmation for SMOF and Sharon’s work. Points noted included

- SMOF is our tangible connection to the land and a witness to IHM’s commitment to sustainability.
- Through programs, partnerships and events, community is built.
- The SMOF experience teaches the spirituality of kinship, our oneness.

The consulting group affirmed SMOF’s value for IHM and the Monroe community. In addition, members saw that it still had much potential.

As they considered the future, the consulting group also articulated ideas, questions and observations connected to the current IHM reality and the IHM commitments to justice, peace and sustainability. They were also connected to the global context of climate change and Pope Francis’ call to all people to recognize the current environmental crisis, especially its impact on the poor and vulnerable, and act to address the issue.

Consulting group’s sense of a way forward

As the group considered SMOF through the lens of the larger context, they saw an invitation to the IHM community to deepen and broaden our understanding of and commitment to sustainability. They identified three questions.

- What are the signs that, as individuals and as a community, we have embraced the call of the 1994 Chapter to develop and act out of an ecological consciousness?
- In what ways does this consciousness impact our decisions, ministries, prayer, lifestyle, etc.?
- Do we recognize ecological consciousness as necessary for the systemic changes called for in this time?

Conclusion
The question about the future of SMOF provides an opportunity for the IHM community to look at our commitment to sustainability with intentionality and in the context of IHM mission and ministry. The consulting group sees that the time is now to re-ignite the IHM commitments to develop and act out of an ecological consciousness and to sustainability – a moral mandate for the 21st century.

**Recommendation and commitment**

The consulting group proposed the following to the Leadership Council (LC): Design a process that engages the community in reviewing what we have done, reflecting on the needs of today and discerning how we move forward. The group envisions

- Time frame of 12 to 18 months;
- Use of existing community structures with additional opportunities as needed; and
- Collaborating with LC and other groups to determine calendar scheduling.

Most of the consulting group members were prepared to commit their time and skills to develop and implement a process. The group noted that they are energized by this possibility and ready to work.

**Leadership Council appointment**

After consideration of the recommendation, the Leadership Council appointed the Sustainability Task Force (STF) and invited members to present a timeline for the process at the November 2015 Coordinating Council. STF members are:

Mary Ann Bredice, IHM, Leadership Council
Paula Cathcart, IHM, local program coordinator GLBD Conference
Danielle Conroyd, director, Sustainable Campus Planning Office
Sarah Nash, coordinator, IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office
Ann Nett, IHM, co-coordinator Hilda-Garden
Gloria Rivera, IHM, coordinator, Great lakes Bioneers Detroit
Mary Fran Uicker, IHM, coordinator, River House – IHM Spirituality Center

**WE NEED YOUR INPUT.**

The STF has identified elements of the process. The first element is a survey. The information received from the surveys will provide both direction and insight for finalizing the process. We will send the online survey Dec. 10 or 11, 2015. You will have 10 days to complete and return it. Assistance will be available and/or accommodations made for those who do not use a computer. The deadline to return the survey is Dec. 21, 2015. In early 2016, the STF will make available the timeline and process.

Nov. 23, 2015