

Ecological Consciousness: **21st Century Imperative**



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IHM Monograph Series

Introduction

Stories are key ways to keep alive a people, a vision, a dream. We tell stories to help people know who we are; where we came from; and where we are going. There are individual stories and group stories. When a community tells its story, it is never singular; rather each storyteller relates the facts from her/his perspective. Each of the particular insights helps us to understand the whole.

Storytelling is what these essays you will be reading are all about. They tell the story of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) of Monroe, Michigan, and the values we have tried to integrate into our sponsored educational institutions. We are telling the story primarily to you, the board members, administrators, faculty and staff of these institutions, so that you will get to know us better and join us in keeping our vision alive.

Over the last decade, the IHM Mission Integration Sponsorship Committee (MISC) has continually asked itself how we can make the IHM values come alive in our institutions now that there are fewer IHM Sisters. In the past, parents and students attending IHM schools could easily say, “it is an IHM school” and have a sense of what that meant. As times changed and fewer IHM Sisters were visibly present in these schools, we found ourselves needing to be clear about what makes this school an IHM school.

We formulated seven educational belief statements that seemed to capture this spirit; they follow this introduction. But statements that exist only on a page don't come alive. They need a story to give them flesh, to make connections and to convey the energy necessary to keep living them into the future.

“We are telling the story
primarily to you ...”

To try to bring these beliefs to life, the MISC invited some IHM Sisters to be part of a collaborative effort to write about key belief statements. We wanted the narrative to be historical and interpreted through each author's unique lens. As a writing group, we reviewed each other's essays multiple times, checking for historical accuracy and making sure the interpretation offered would resonate with the congregation.

We are pleased to offer these essays as a significant resource for you as you assume greater responsibility in living out the IHM vision in your institution. Although each essay is published separately, we hope you will find them interesting enough to read many, if not most, of them. Each essay tells its own story but all the essays tell a much fuller story of how IHM evolved and how it has and is affecting all of you in our sponsored schools.

We look forward to talking about the essays with you and would suggest planning time on various meeting agendas to reflect together on the story and how it impacts you and the future of your school. These essays are an inaugural step in our committee's dream of having all current and future stakeholders in IHM institutions be so steeped in the IHM vision and so energized in living it out that the story of what makes an IHM school IHM continues well into the future.

*Nancy Sylvester, IHM
Chair of the Mission Integration
Sponsorship Committee*

Core Educational Beliefs

Inspired by our founders, Theresa Maxis Duchemin and Louis Florent Gillet, the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) have served the people of God in education since 1845.

The mission of the IHM-sponsored educational institutions includes personal and social transformation, which bear witness to the liberating mission of Jesus.

We believe our sponsored institutions are partners in mission by fostering excellence in education and by living into the following deeply held beliefs:

- a commitment to the **liberating mission of Jesus** with special focus on those who are poor, abandoned or oppressed;
- the **development of a Christian community** that witnesses to a profound respect for each human being and an acceptance of all persons;
- challenging students to make **decisions in the light of Gospel values** and global realities;
- encouraging students to **act on behalf of justice**;
- a commitment to eradicate the causes of oppression and injustice through a **feminist perspective** that empowers all;
- **ecological consciousness** that challenges all to recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all Creation and nurtures relationships that protect our common home; and
- a **holistic educational process** that fosters self-motivation, flexibility and openness to change.



Ecological Consciousness: 21st Century Imperative

*"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."*¹

Since our founding in 1845, the IHMs have been known for being educators. Having a commitment to learning has challenged us to continue growing in our understanding of our charism, the liberating mission of Jesus, within the evolving context of our time. Today we claim ecological consciousness as an expression of our charism. This monograph will explore how this shift in consciousness evolved within the IHM congregation; how it is rooted in a deep spirituality; and how the IHM congregation is living out the commitment. We hope that through our sharing you will experience a desire to continue your transformative work, to see in new ways and to experience the profound oneness that is the Sacred Earth Community.



Ecological Consciousness and *Spirituality*

Ecological Consciousness – what is it?

One way to describe consciousness is the way one views the world. It is the lens through which we interpret and make meaning of everything around us. It is made up of values, assumptions, beliefs and worldviews. Consciousness develops throughout one's life. Yet it is not only an individual for whom this development occurs. It is also the groups or ways people join together that create another dimension of consciousness, called the collective consciousness. This also influences one's individual development. One's tribe, family, church, neighborhood, city, state, nation each develops a certain way of viewing the world, of being in the world that is absorbed by the individual quite often without any awareness. As one continues the developmental journey, one becomes aware of the limited view of the world from which one is operating and can choose to expand her/his consciousness embracing a greater whole, welcoming diversity, greater complexity and the capacity to hold paradox.

Everyone and everything is connected. An ecological consciousness knows that the well-being of humans is directly related to the well-being of Earth. “Ecological consciousness is the awareness that nearly every aspect of our way of life affects the environment so decisively that we now must choose whether to let the effects go unchecked, or we change the way we live in order to arrest the damage.”²



To live out of an ecological consciousness is to transform lifestyles and values that are rooted in that earlier stage of consciousness. It is to become connected to nature again and to design everything that needs to be done to be in harmony with the rhythms of nature. This is extremely urgent in the face of climate change when the use of life-giving energy needs to be re-imagined to be in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Without an ecological consciousness one fails to see the importance or urgency of making economic or political choices that may not immediately benefit one's self or one's local community. To choose the common good for our common Earth home is the challenge facing the 21st century generation. An essay in *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* begins with a quote from Thich Nhat Hanh that offers a graphic image of humanity without an ecological consciousness.³

Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff alerts us to the seriousness and necessity of acting out of ecological consciousness. He asserts that what is required of humans is a revolution of the mind. Humankind needs to restore a relationship with nature. This is not a new relationship, but rather is a call to wake up, to discover again or to experience for the first time the profound reality that humans are part of the one, interconnected, sacred community of life. Such transformation of consciousness is spiritual work.

“Without a revolution of the mind, it will not be possible to bring about a revolution in relations between humankind and nature. The new alliance has its roots in the depths of the human being. There humankind must work out the great and splendid motives and the secret magic that transforms the appearance of all reality, so that it assumes its rightful place as a link in the vast communitarian chain of the cosmos.”⁴

Ecological Consciousness as Spiritual Work

Thomas Berry, Passionist priest and Earth scholar (now deceased), viewed Earth and the wider universe as epiphanies of God. He believed that the perilous state of Earth is fundamentally a spiritual challenge resulting from the “spiritual autism” of the human community. He claimed that, as a species, we have lost our sense of awe and gratitude for the incredible gift of creation and for our sense of kinship and interdependence with other creatures and life forms on the planet.

As a remedy for spiritual autism, Berry asks humankind to nurture an experience of intimacy with Earth. He insists that aesthetic appreciation, pragmatic use and intellectual understanding of Earth are not enough. What is needed is the rediscovery of awe and reverence until we can feel we are one with the whole of creation – capacities richly developed in native peoples and mystics. We need to know ourselves as “of Earth” rather than “on Earth,” rediscovering reverence and communion with plants and flowers; oceans, lakes and rivers; hills and mountains; valleys and

plains. We need attunement to Earth as a single, breathing organism in whose life we share and also a realization that we are part of the wider universe and a 13.8 billion-year history! Thus, we humans have a tiny but significant place not only on Earth but amidst the sun, the moon, the stars and the millions of galaxies beyond our own. For Berry, this renewed awareness by humans is a form of spiritual renewal.⁵

Experiences of kinship with Earth, which includes the human community, move us out of exploitive relationships with other life forms and into participative bonding. They open us



“Spiral Speak” - Sam Brown Art - Abiquiu, N.M.

to the beauty, resilience and interdependencies that characterize all life of our planetary home. Sometimes with immediacy and sometimes more gradually, we are seized with a sense of wonder, sacredness and/or communion that changes everything. Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP, expresses it this way: “Once you begin to grasp something of the Universe as the *process by which* God created, then the Universe becomes as Berry suggests, a *primary* revelation, a *primary* sacred scripture.”⁶

Way down deep we can come to realize, personally and for our species, what theologian Elizabeth Johnson says so clearly: that the love of neighbor now includes the entire community of life; that concern for the poor, the oppressed and the common good now includes the natural world; that compassion and action for justice now extend to all of Earth's life systems and species.⁷ Lives poured out in love so that Earth may thrive and humanity may flourish – here is kinship in action; here is the reign of God visible in the reality of our times.

“The Great Work before us, the task of moving modern industrial civilization from its present devastating influence on the Earth to a more benign mode of presence, is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves.”⁸

Living in a web of life, interconnectedness, one sacred community of life all describe this growing awareness, which is as ancient as it is new. Every major religion has within its mystical tradition the belief that are all one. For the IHM community, ecological consciousness is rooted in our faith and in our spirituality.



IHM Continuing Journey Toward *Ecological Consciousness*

The history of the IHM community is replete with significant times of change. However, an exploration of the IHM commitment to ecological consciousness appropriately

focuses on the period beginning with Vatican Council II in the early 1960s and continuing to the present. These decades were, and continue to be, a time of invitation to see anew. As is the case of many changes within the IHM community, the journey toward ecological consciousness found expression within the interplay of word and action.



The Council had urged all Catholics to know the call of the Church in the 20th century world. The elected IHM leaders and the community as a whole responded to this invitation. IHMs went into the world in this spirit and our eyes and hearts were opened. We experienced the challenges and gifts of functioning as “part of” rather than “apart from” the world.



And what a world it was becoming! Not only the Church and religious life were changing, but our nation and the entire world were experiencing major political, social and cultural revolutions.⁹

IHM Journey Expressed in Word – Chapter Directions and Statements

Every six years, the IHM community gathers in Assembly and Chapter to pray, ponder and review our mission and ministry and set the direction for the next six years. As early as 1972, 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 people. This strong, comprehensive vision and call to action [Affirmation 10] remains a vital touchstone for IHM decision-making more than 45 years later. It gives witness of a community rooted in the Gospel and the liberating mission of Jesus, imbued with the visionary and risk-taking spirit of their founders, awakened to the needs of the time, convinced of the transformative power of education and compelled to act.

In the 1987 Assembly, the community reaffirmed its 1972 commitment and also signaled in the introduction to the reaffirmation statement an awareness of a growing ecological consciousness among us. “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 ...”¹⁰



The development of ecological consciousness is a process. In that process, we came to see eco-justice and social justice as one.

1994 Chapter Enactment on Eco-Justice

We, 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. – *Adapted from the IHM Environment Committee Statement*



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. Specifically this means: a) instituting through the Environment Committee a continuing process of re-education; b) intentionally developing the new personal asceticism of an ecologically responsible lifestyle; c) evaluating and revising current congregational policies and practices in light of the new consciousness and call congregationally sponsored institutions to do so also; d) joining with and/or initiating groups to act on local ecological issues, with special attention to the impact on the poor and minority communities; e) collaborating with others in shaping public policies that will foster ecological co-responsibility and eco-justice. – *Chapter Enactment 1994*

2000 Chapter Enactments

We choose to work collaboratively to create a culture of right relationship with the earth community, a relationship marked by sustainability and eco-justice. We will do this through our varied ministries, by educating ourselves and through our life-style choices, both personal and corporate. – *Chapter 2000*



Convinced that the plight of the Earth is intimately connected to global poverty, violence and oppression, we commit our personal and communal efforts and resources to build sustainable community. This commitment challenges us both to personal transformation and systemic change. ...

– *Chapter 2000*

2004 Congregational Endorsement of the Earth Charter

On Earth Day, April 22, 2004, IHMs endorsed the Earth Charter, an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century and a product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values.

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 culture 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 future of peace. Towards 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.



We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a future of peace. Towards 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.

The key principles of The Earth Charter are:

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Ecological integrity
- Social and economic justice
- Democracy, nonviolence, and peace.

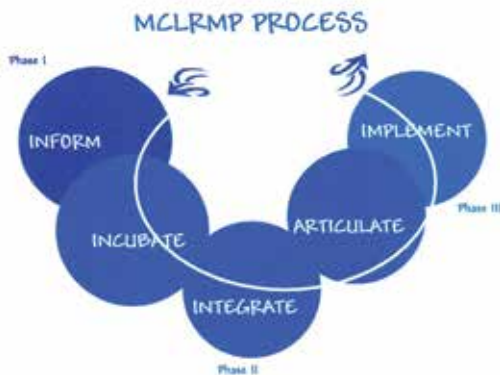
IHM Sisters and Associates endorse The Earth Charter.

- We will use The Earth Charter in the places we minister and live in ways that are appropriate given the situation.
- We will cooperate with others in working for the implementation of its principles. – *Approved as an IHM Corporate Stance April 15, 2004*



IHM Journey Expressed in Deed: Renovation and Ongoing Commitments

During their term of office, the 1994-2000 Leadership Council undertook a review of the IHM Monroe campus and buildings. The focus of the study was to determine how to better meet the needs of retired and infirm sisters as well as to discover a more efficient and effective use of the buildings and grounds. They appointed a steering committee that designed a plan and process that engaged broad-based community involvement. It connected with other opportunities underway in the community, inviting us to expand our vision and assisted in the revitalization of IHM identity and mission as a congregation. The buildings, while 70 years old, were sturdy and reflective of the quality craftsmanship that had characterized this Depression-era construction project. Thus, one of the critical questions – whether to build new or to renovate – was answered.



The Monroe Campus Long Range Master Plan (MCLRMP) committee facilitated a multiyear communal process (1996–1999) to engage all members of the community in discerning how best to proceed. The process significantly contributed to consensus-building, which led to the 130 participants’ unanimous recommendation to the Leadership Council of the **Integrating Idea and Vision for the Monroe campus.**

The IHM Monroe Campus would become a center of new growth and new learning, of transformation of consciousness through transformation of land and building use and through personal, corporate and systemic conversion of mind and heart. The center would be a sacred place actualizing the faith dimension of the core value of sustainability of life in all its forms.

The center would be animated by the IHM foundational belief that our life commitment is to bring about the dream of God on planet Earth through respect for, nurturing of and promoting the liberation and well-being of all persons and all of nature as God's good creation. The center would be developed not only to meet our own needs but in relation with others to carry the mission forward beyond our lifetime.

Because living sustainably requires a transformation of consciousness and because of the IHM Congregation's historic commitment to education as a transformative process, the center would have an educational focus. The Campus as a whole would provide opportunities for learnings and experiences necessary for transformational education of mind, body and spirit.¹¹

The Integrating Idea served as a guide in sustainably renovating the 376,000 square-foot Motherhouse. Renovation began in spring 2001. During the renovation, St. Mary Academy was home to Motherhouse residents. The building was adapted to accommodate not only the needs

of residents but also those of the congregational offices and services. The good spirit with which sisters and employees accepted this challenge and adapted to their temporary living/working quarters was a significant contribution. It allowed the massive renovation, with its attendant sustainable elements, to be completed within two years.



The process did not begin by claiming sustainability as the overarching construct for moving forward, but it is where vision, process, attentive listening, prayer and commitment to discernment brought us. Mary McCann, IHM, congregational president at the time, captured the experience in these words.

“I am moved and awed by our unanimity in this recommendation and the process together which has allowed this work of the Spirit among us. Rilke’s words come to mind. ‘You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born. Fear not the strangeness that you feel. The future must enter into you long before it happens.’”¹²

The renovation of the Motherhouse was a bold action undertaken by the community.

The Integrating Idea and Vision continues to help shape the ongoing initiatives undertaken on the Monroe campus. Over the last 20 years, the IHM community has developed ways of anchoring our growing ecological consciousness through ongoing commitments. The following examples are illustrative.

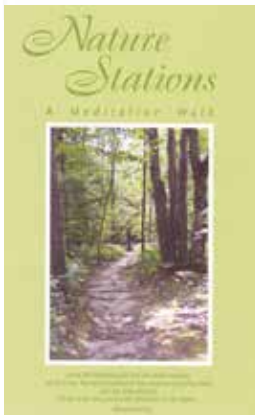
Community Gardens – Sisters in Detroit and Oakland, Calif., began community gardens to serve their neighborhoods. This experience taught interconnectedness and built trusting relationships.



Learning Opportunities – Sisters, associates and staff had multiple learning opportunities, including retreats, speakers and the National Bioneers Conferences.



After the renovation, learning opportunities continued. IHM Sisters and Associates wrote and published articles, reflections and prayers, designed, presented and participated in retreats, workshops and lectures focused on the Universe story, Christian story, IHM story and Earth story. Exploring ecological consciousness, local and global sustainability, religion, science, cosmology, spirituality and other related topics deepened our desire to grow together in understanding, living, communicating and celebrating these stories in the realities and circumstances of our times.



Seeding Ecological Consciousness – Before and after the renovation some IHMs initiated ministries in their local regions to provide opportunities for people to experience and to grow in their awareness that all is interconnected in the sacred web of life.

In 1990, Patricia Nagle, IHM, and Sharon Joyer, SNDdeN, began *Earth Home* in Oakland, Calif. Earth Home is committed to creating a new world order marked by the Gospel values of justice and peace. In our interdependent world, we explore ways to live in right relationship with all in the sacred community of life.¹³

In 1998, Annemarie Askwith, IHM, in collaboration with others, launched *EARTH SPIRIT* in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It is a community dedicated to increasing awareness of Earth-healing ways of being and living. “We understand the invitation and core of ecological consciousness is to open our humanity to a personal relationship with earth and Universe and align our living to honor their ways of fostering quality conditions for all life.”¹⁴



In 2004, Gloria Rivera, IHM, and Paula Cathcart, IHM, initiated Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (GLBD). They experienced the energy and value of the National Conference and the Great Lakes Traverse City satellite conference. To test their sense that Detroit, their home city, would both contribute to and benefit from a Bioneers conference, they brought together individuals and organizations engaged in action and advocacy toward a world of peace, justice and sustainability. These local community consultants affirmed the idea and eleven committed their time to make the first Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference a reality.¹⁵

Published Articles – The *IHM Journal*, *Quarterly*, *ihmpact* and a quarterly reflection by Mary McCann, IHM, *A Time to Sow*, explored social, economic, ecological and spiritual elements of sustainability. These invited readers to awaken and respond to the beauty, mystery and challenge of the Earth community.



Tours – The Sustainable Campus Planning Office and the River Raisin Institute collaborated to design and organize programs and tours of the award-winning sustainably renovated Motherhouse. This raised public awareness and provided practical knowledge.



Justice, Peace, and Sustainability Office (JPSO) – Activated in 2001, the office provides a way for IHM committees and groups focused on a specific issue to be informed and supportive of one another's work. Weekly emails inform about and call the community to act on current justice, peace and sustainability issues. In 2007, JPSO received a grant from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for youth education and produced *This Is Your Home*, a creative and informative CD in English and Spanish that was widely distributed. (www.ihmsisters.org “Living Justly”)



River Raisin Institute – This nonprofit initiated by the Leadership Council in 2003 sponsors educational works with the goal of respecting, nurturing and promoting the well-being of all creation. The River Raisin Institute works in partnership with communities that seek to develop, revitalize or preserve sustainable systems of living in order to improve the health of the community. This work flows from a deep belief in the sacredness and interdependence of all creation. (www.rriearth.org)





Sustainable Campus Planning Office – The Leadership Council named this office in 2012. It made clearer the congregation’s commitment to sustainability on the IHM Monroe Campus and underscores the value of the work and responsibility of the director and her co-workers to maintain the vision and values of campus sustainability.

Campus Spirituality – The natural beauty and biodiversity of the grounds invite all to both ponder and experience the oneness of creation. River House, an IHM spirituality center, provides various programs and individual and small group retreats.





St. Mary Organic Farm – In 1998 the garden began with herbs, developed into a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and currently is a community garden that now attracts hundreds of families as members and visitors into deeper communion in the sacred web of life.

Sustainability Task Force – Appointed by the Leadership Council in 2015, this group designed an 18-month community process intended to both celebrate our accomplishments and deepen our sense of ecological consciousness and global sustainability.¹⁶ Please take time to read the end note for more information and access to a variety of quality resources.



The IHM community is one of the many communities of women religious engaged in developing and acting out of an ecological consciousness. All experience the urgency and necessity for the human community to recognize its oneness in the one sacred web of life.

The time has come when the single greatest service that women religious can make to the larger destinies of the human, the Christian, and the Earth community is the recovery of our human and Christian intimacy with all those wonderful participants in the universe of being.¹⁷



Ecological Consciousness: A Call and A Challenge

Ethical Imperative

In his book, *Ecology and Liberation a New Paradigm*, Leonardo Boff¹⁸ makes a distinction between morals and ethics. In his view, morals are circumscribed by the habits, values and choices within a specific culture. Ethics goes beyond morals and requires “*unlimited responsibility for everything that exists and lives.*”

In “The Third Mediation,” a 1982 essay by Thomas Berry, the author notes that the development of this mediation between the human community and Earth has become an imperative so strong that it overshadows the first mediation – between the divine and the human – and the second mediation – the inter-human, the reconciliation of differing human groups. Berry sees the third mediation as the work humans are called to do in this 21st century.¹⁹

“It is not only food for the body that comes from Earth, but our very powers of thinking and the great images in our imagination. Our arts and education, too, all proceed from Earth. Even our knowledge of God comes to us from our acquaintance with Earth, for the divine reveals itself first of all in the sky and in the waters and in the wind, in the mountains and valleys, in the birds of the air and in all living forms that flower and move over the surface of the planet.”²⁰

Humans are *of* Earth, not *on* Earth. For those who follow Jesus, it may help to remember the words attributed to Jesus in John 10:10 “I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” One may understand “they” as including all living things. In relation to this time in history, we can say humans act ethically when they contribute to the fullness of all life and unethically when they act primarily, or only, from an anthropocentric and individualistic view of life.

Pope Francis’ Affirmation and Challenge

I wish to express to you my closeness and encouragement, so that the work of these days will be carried out in an open and generous spirit. What you are going to debate affects the whole of humanity, in particular the poorest and future generations. More than that, it is a grave ethical and moral responsibility.

... The consequences of environmental changes, which are already felt in a dramatic way in many States, especially the insular ones of the Pacific, remind us of the gravity of negligence and inaction. The time to find global solutions is running out. We will only be able to find adequate solutions if we act together and in agreement. Hence, there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act.²¹

These words of Pope Francis, addressing world leaders gathered in Peru in December 2014 to prepare for the Climate Change Summit, name the urgency of *now*. Economies based on unlimited growth and development are not sustainable.

Also, these words hinted at the encyclical, *Laudato Si*²² or *Care for Our Common Home* issued in 2015, in which Francis masterfully addresses the multi-faceted problem of climate change linked with the urgent challenge to Christians to undertake a change in how they understand the interconnection of all life. Such a change brings about new behaviors and actions and has a profound effect on one's spirituality.

Using the term "integral ecology" [#139], Francis connects concerns about the environment with the concerns facing us as a human community in every dimension of life. He challenges us to seek comprehensive solutions that address the interactions within the natural systems themselves and with social

systems. Francis directly addresses the need for a new paradigm. He noted that we cannot only look for solutions in technology but also for a change in humanity.

As Christians, we are also called to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet." [#9]

The Pope's vision supports the emerging consciousness that has been growing among many, including the IHM community, as we came to see eco-justice and social justice as one. Pope Francis asks these questions for our reflection. "What kind of a world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children now growing up? ... What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does Earth have of us? It is no longer enough then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one that dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn." [#160]

What is expressed here is a growing ecological consciousness.

A Final Call and Challenge

Taking time to reflect on the questions posed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* can encourage us individually and collectively to respond to the challenge of this century. The Preamble of the Earth Charter names this time in Earth's history as "a critical moment" and places the responsibility to make a choice directly on the human community. It is up to us to decide how to move into a future that holds both "great peril and great promise." Will we open our minds and hearts to the whole community of life? Are we ready to surrender the destructive view that Earth is here to satisfy our self-centered desires? Are we ready to claim our oneness with all life and to learn new ways of seeing and acting that will move all into a future of great promise?



These questions are not just for academics, scientists and experts but for us – all of us. These are critical, ethical questions for the 21st century and our response will impact the future of the Earth community. For the sake of all life, we, all humans, need to accept our responsibility to develop and to act out of an ecological consciousness.

Ecological consciousness requires that we wake up to a new way of seeing and being. This awakening is neither simple nor fast. It is a process that is likely to challenge our values, beliefs and choices. Clearly it questions the "business as usual" approach. While IHMs know this to be true, we realize ongoing discernment is essential to living our commitment. The challenges we face as IHMs include providing for the needs of an aging community, fewer members and how best to use our resources in response to the needs of this time. You may find some resonance with us on your own journey to develop and act out of an ecological consciousness.

This time in history, our time, calls us to see anew and requires a transformation of mind and heart. The closing quote from Ilia Delio, OSF, invites us to a new consciousness, an ethical imperative. May we respond with a wholehearted YES.

A new age has dawned with a new universe story. It is an invitation to a new consciousness, a new catholicity in which whole-making can be renewed: the whole of life imbued with the wholeness of God. The world is not an objective "other" outside the human person or an obstacle to God. Rather, it is the outflow of human creativity, freedom and imagination. What this means for Christian life and the Church in our cosmos is the challenge and the journey ahead.²³



“Let ours be a time remembered for the *awakening* of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for *justice and peace*, and the joyful *celebration* of life.”

– The Earth Charter

PHOTO NOTES

Page 3: Koffi, a resident at Freedom House Detroit seeking asylum, leads gardeners at the IHM Organic Farm in a harvest dance. The garden provided a safe and healing space for asylum-seekers.

Page 4: This beautiful image by Sam Brown expresses the energy and beauty of the sacred community of life.

Page 5: Hope Takes Root, a garden for homeless people in Detroit, was initiated by Elizabeth Walters, IHM. She is second from the right in the back row.

Page 6: IHM Sisters and Associates joined thousands at the 2014 People's Climate March in New York City.

Page 6: Sharon McNeil, IHM Associate and former IHM Ecology director; Madonna Oswald, IHM; and Dorothy McDaniel, IHM, share a laugh while harvesting. Sister Dorothy served as IHM President from 1988 to 1994. Her Leadership group engaged AL Fritch, S.J., to do an ecological audit of the campus grounds and established the first Environment Committee which studied the audit and recommended sites for implementation.

Page 7: Left: a view of the newly planted IHM garden with St. Mary Academy in the background. Right: the photo of the flowers and the butterfly, by Nancy Seubert, captures the exquisite beauty of the garden in summer.

Page 8: "The Poor People's Campaign: A Call for Moral Revival" called for weekly demonstrations at state capitols across the country from May 14–June 18, 2018. This is one of the weekly demonstrations at the Capitol in Lansing, Mich. Two IHMs were arrested for their acts of civil disobedience – Sisters Alice Baker in Lansing and Barbara Beesley in Detroit. www.poorpeoplescampaign.org

Page 8/9: Carolina Diez de Andino, IHM, is an English professor at the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico. She uses the Earth Charter to teach ESL to her class of international students. Students become proficient in another language and are challenged to be global citizens in the 21st century.

Page 9: This image shows the content/intention of each of the three phases of the long-range planning process. The number of people participating, as well as the processes used, varied in each of the three phases based on the anticipated outcomes.

Page 10: On the last day of the Discernment Group meeting in September 1999, sisters raise their voting cards to recommend the Monroe Campus Integrating Idea to the Leadership Council. The result? A unanimous "yes" vote by the 130 participants.

Page 11: Ann Nett, IHM, ministered with the community in Recife, Brazil, for several decades. She learned much from them about beneficial herbs for making healing teas and salves. After returning to Detroit, Sister Ann planted Hilde Garden, an herbal garden on the Marygrove College campus. She has a small business providing wonderful comforting and healing salves and teas.

Page 11: *Four Stories: Integrating the Universe Story, the Christian Story, the Earth Story and the IHM Story:* In 2007, IHM President Mary Frances Gilleran and the Leadership Council invited theologian Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM, STD, "to write a paper to help us (and others) see the connections and distinctions within

these four stories. We asked for this paper so we can continue to learn and explore together in this quest for God. ... We hope it will generate many conversations and fresh ideas for an inclusive worldview that makes greed, racism, classism, sexism and other imbalances on Earth unthinkable.” (Introduction)

Page 11: *Nature Stations: A Meditative Walk* is the creative work of B.J. Schlachter, IHM Associate, and Margaret Schmidt, IHM. B.J. wrote the text and together with Sister Margaret created the responses and rituals. The Introduction states, “We are the first generation of humans to realize that our actions or inactions may determine the fate of all future life on this planet. Through baptism in Christ, we are called to a purpose and role in the evolutionary coming of God’s kin-dom of love, justice, and peace. This is our cosmic moment in time to **LIVE** God’s dream for all creation, the ‘reign of God’ that Jesus taught and lived.”

Page 12: Throughout 2017, Detroit was revisiting the 1967 Rebellion and its impact on the city and the community. “1967 Revolution to Evolution 2017” was the theme of the 2017 GLBD Conference and the topic of the plenary session. The women pictured here reflected on their experience of this pivotal time in Detroit. What was the impact on them? How did it shape their community engagement as adults? Left column: Erma Leaphart, *Sierra Club Detroit* (water issue), Rhonda Anderson, *Sierra Club Detroit* (environmental justice), Maureen Taylor, *Michigan Welfare Rights Organization*; right column: Gloria A. House, *poet*, Sharon Howell, *James & Grace Lee Boggs Center*. Not pictured is Gloria Lowe, *We Want Green Too*. Video available at www.glbd.org.

Page 12: Donna Hart, IHM, leads a tour of the sustainably renovated Motherhouse for members of the Midwest Green Building Council in 2005. Thousands have taken tours of the renovated Motherhouse and campus since 2003. Participants represent a variety of interests: schools of architecture, green building, faith communities, historic preservation, Marygrove College, community groups and students of all ages. Contact www.ihmsisters.org, or Danielle Conroyd, project director, Sustainable Campus Planning Office at dconroyd@ihmsisters.org.

Page 12: Rich Wiske of Green Toe Gardens is a Detroit beekeeper. He has been both presenter and vendor at GLBD conferences. These curious students appear ready to taste the soothing sweetness of his honey.

Page 13: IHM Sisters, Associates and staff from various peace, justice and sustainability groups pause for a group picture in the Motherhouse courtyard before returning to their summit meeting. www.ihmsisters.org

Page 13: Sarah Nash, coordinator of JPSO, and Susan Rakoczy, IHM, participated in the Sept. 21, 2014, People’s Climate March in New York City. The march was led by frontline communities and indigenous groups from around the continent and the world, who are many of the first victims of climate change. This date, World Peace Day, was chosen by the organizers because national leaders were gathering at the UN for a summit on Climate Change. About 2,600 simultaneous events took place in 150 countries. The people of the world made clear the need to address climate change.

Page 13: Brigid Wade, IHM, leads an enthusiastic group of sixth-graders to their first learnshop at the Lake Erie Water Festival on the IHM Monroe campus. In partnership with others, the River Raisin Institute (RRI) has hosted the festival here since 2014. Lenawee County joined the partnership in 2019.

Page 13: The RRI received a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to develop a Watershed Management Plan for the S.S. LaPointe Drain in Monroe County. This photo shows a handler with one of the scent- and source-trained canines. These dogs are able to sniff out and to identify the source of human E.coli, which may be contaminating the water. Their skill provides essential information for those writing the management plan.

Page 14: This group is learning about the prairie in front of the Motherhouse. The Western Lake Erie Cluster of The Stewardship Network offered this program. The presenter is from the Nature Conservancy. IHM Sisters Gloria Rivera (foreground) and Anne Wisda (sunglasses and visor in the back), who served on the RRI Board, explore the variety of grasses. The prairies and swales on the IHM campus provide habitat and prevent runoff.

Page 14: The Sustainable Campus Planning Office and the RRI collaborate to keep garlic mustard, an invasive species, in check. Annually, volunteers go to work removing the plant. Sharon Venier, staff assistant, has become skilled at garlic mustard removal.

Page 14: In September 2015, River House –IHM Spirituality Center, IHM Sustainable Campus Planning Office and River Raisin Institute collaborated to offer “All Beings Confluence,” an interactive community project. In these photos, we see Candace Rekert, IHM, painting her panel and all the completed panels hung closely together. Each is an image of a living Being, representing more than 250 species created thus far. The pieces are arranged in such a way that no single Being is seen without seeing others through or adjacent to it – a strong metaphor for interdependence and self-organization of ecosystems.

Page 15: Happy harvesters display their summer squash. Left to right are IHM Sisters Dorothy Diederichs, Margaret Ann Henige, Theresa Coulter, Patricia Soltesz and Stella Dolan.

Page 15: Pictured here is the first IHM Organic Garden Committee. Left to right: Sally Stebbins, Nicole Tennerello, Pam Fording, IHM Associate, Sharon McNeil, IHM Associate, and Nancy Seubert.

Page 18: This image is a reminder of what we all need to be about as one Earth community.

Page 19: Alaska delights in mimicking the butterfly in flight – just two playmates at the beach. Alaska is the granddaughter of Pat Smeekens Sodo (a former IHM Sister) and her husband, Don Sodo.

ENDNOTES

1 Eco-Justice Direction, IHM Chapter, 1993-94. Chapter, an extended meeting required by Canon Law, takes place every six years. Members of the congregation elect the Chapter delegates. During the Chapter, the delegates elect the IHM Leadership Council and reach consensus on the direction or focus of the community. The specific decisions are called enactments, directions or affirmations.

2 Randy David, Copenhagen Conference, *Philippin Daily Inquire*. Dec. 12, 2009.

3 John Stanley & David Loy, "At the Edge of the Roof: The Evolutionary Crisis of the Human Spirit," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth, a collection of essays*, Edited by Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee (Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), p.37

"We have constructed a system we can't control. It imposes itself on us, and we become its slaves and victims. We have created a society in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, and in which we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth. In my mind I see a group of chickens in a cage disputing over a few seeds of grain, unaware that in a few hours they will all be killed." - Thich Nhat Hanh

4 Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), p.36.

5 Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Harmony/Bell Tower, 1999).

6 Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP, "The Work of Genesis Farm: interview," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, a collection of essays, Edited by Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee (Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013).

7 Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, "Passion for God, Passion for Earth." *Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-First Century, Essays in Honor of Joan D. Chittister*, Edited by Mary Hembrow Snyder (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

8 Berry, Chapter 1.

9 Barbara Stanbridge, IHM, *A Brief History of Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, pp.14-17, and Kathleen Schultz, IHM, *Radiant Justice in IHM Mission and Identity*, pp.8-10 and 14-15. IHM Monograph Series (Monroe, Mich.: Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, © 2016 and 2018).

10 From Assembly Directions 1987: In the spirit of Affirmation 10 and with a growing sense of the interdependence and unity of all creation as central to an emerging worldview, we feel compelled:

- to stand in solidarity with those who suffer in a world characterized by fragmentation, violence and poverty;
- to participate in the shaping of a new world order consonant with Gospel values of harmony and unity, peace, and justice; and an equitable sharing of the world's resources;
- to nurture a reconciling and healing community among ourselves and beyond;
- to live and work non-violently toward a world of peace and justice;
- to give priority to the special claims of the materially poor on us;
- to implement the above wherever we serve, and, at this time, particularly in the city of Detroit.

11 Integrating Idea Vision presented to Leadership Council, October 1999.

12 “Mary McCann’s Closing Remarks,” *MCLRMP UPDATES*, October 1999 issue.

13 Over the years, Sisters Patricia and Sharon engaged a variety of ways to realize the intention of Earth Home. These included welcoming refugees, developing neighborhood gardens to involve young people and participating in the World Parliament of Religions. “The invitation for us is to keep our hearts and minds open to recognize where we need to place our energies.”

14 Earth Spirit began with a three-day gathering near the fall equinox, one half day of which is open to the public. Earth Spirit continues to provide creative experiences, information and resources and retreats. We do this with the intention of moving people to live and act responsibly within their own regional communities.

15 Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (GLBD), A Bioneers Resilient Communities Network celebrated its 14th anniversary in October 2018. Bioneers (biological pioneers) is an annual conference, a movement and a way of life. GLBD’s mission is to promote sustainable community that fosters life-giving relationships, nurtures connections, and celebrates visionary ideas and practical solutions for restoring Earth’s communities. Learn more at www.glbd.org and www.bioneers.org (National).

16 The Sustainability Task Force (STF) emerged from a group of IHM Sisters, Associates and staff called together by Mary Ann Bredice, IHM, Mission Councilor, to consult regarding the future of the IHM organic farm. The group recommended that the garden ministry continue. They also saw this as an opportune time to invite the community to review and to deepen its commitment to ecological consciousness and global sustainability. While the STF completed its work in June 2017, two “Ecotone Groups” continue to work. One is focused on the issue of poverty and the other on the issue of food. We encourage you to go to www.ihmsisters.org. Click on *Living Justly* and then click on *Ecological Consciousness and Global Sustainability*. Here you will find some excellent resources and a description of the process.

17 Thomas Berry. *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 2009), p.80

18 Boff, pp.29-32.

19 Berry, pp.8-13.

20 Ibid., p.9.

21 Vatican City, Dec. 11, 2014, www.Zenit.org. This link provides a translation of the message that Pope Francis sent to the Minister of the Environment of the Republic of Peru, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, on the occasion of the 20th session of the Conference of the Parties and the 10th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol.

22 “Encyclical is a letter from the pope to the bishops that usually deals with doctrinal matters.” Webster’s New World Dictionary, Second Concise Edition, 1979.

23 Ilia Delio, OSF, *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 2015) p.33.



Paula Cathcart, IHM

Paula Cathcart, IHM, serves as local program coordinator for the Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference. In 2004, with Gloria Rivera, IHM, she co-initiated Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit, a satellite site of the national Bioneers. She earned her bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and her master's degree in guidance and counseling from Oakland University. She ministered in formal education as principal, counselor and teacher in elementary and high schools and served on the Northwest Province team and the 1994-2000 IHM Leadership Council. One responsibility given her was to develop a long-range master plan for the Monroe campus. Sister Paula brought together a skilled team, and together they designed a creative process for communal participation that resulted in the "Integrating Idea" for the campus and the sustainable renovation of the Motherhouse.

Mary McCann, IHM

Mary McCann, IHM, holds a master's degree from Regis College in Toronto, Ontario, and doctorate in educational administration from Notre Dame University. From 1982 until 1994, she was co-director of spirituality and ministry programs at Regis College of the Toronto School of Theology; she is an experienced spiritual director. From 1994-2000, Sister Mary served as president of the IHM congregation during the governance transition from provinces to one elected Leadership Council. Since then, her ministry has included spiritual direction and facilitation of related programs; writing projects, including *A Time to Sow* – seasonal reflections on our one Earth community; and maintaining long-term relationships with people living with prolonged disabilities.



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