

# CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



## EARTH DAY EDITION APRIL 22, 2019

When I mentioned to one of our sisters that the theme of Earth Day 2019 was *Protect Endangered Species* she said, "Nuns are an endangered species!" No one questions the challenges religious communities of women face from rising median ages and fewer younger members. But we cannot fail to rejoice that we have a much more expansive notion of community than we did the Sixties when our numbers reached their historical peak. We are aware, now more than ever before, that we are members of an Earth community and that the wellbeing of each species is intertwined with the wellbeing of each species.

The articles in the Earth Day issue of CEN Newsletter demonstrate how the congregations in the Charity Federation are expanding, in ways large and small, our new understanding of community. We look beyond the questions of survival of our individual congregations to the flourishing of all

the life systems of our planet. To paraphrase a statement that Thomas Berry originally made about health care – "There is no flourishing religious life on a dying planet." Sister of Charity of New York Associate Mary Kellam reports on the Stanfordville Cosmological Spirituality Group in which the members see the Charity story in the context of the 13.8 billion year story of the cosmos. We share with you an article from the Bulletin of the Canadian Religious Conference on how the Marthas of Antigonish are building community with soil and with young people through their garden. You can check out the Martha's garden in this short video as well <https://vimeo.com/196029812>; Sister of Charity of Seton Hill Barbara Ann Smelko offers us a beautiful prayer service to enter into the theme of Earth Day 2019. May our prayer and our action result in a flourishing Company of Charity on a flourishing Earth!

Carol

Cj

Terry

**The Charity Earth Network is an organization of sisters and associates of the Congregations of the Sisters of Charity Federation who are interested in**

**-reflecting on ecology/the new cosmology/sustainability from the perspective of the Vincentian/Setonian charism;**

**-sharing information and resources**

**-supporting each other in our efforts to advocate for a more sustainable Earth community.**

## The Sisters of Charity of New York Cosmological Spirituality Group



*Stanfordville Cosmological Spirituality Group. Author Mary Kellam is seated in the first row on the right.*

Shared grilled cheese sandwiches in our home close to the Stanfordville, Sisters of Charity Farm in Dutchess County, New York, conversation about how our work in New York City neighborhoods in the 1960's crossed over, and curiosity about what our guest, Sister Carol De Angelo, SC, meant by the *new cosmology and the church* were the unlikely impetus for a decade long spiritual and intellectual journey for a diverse group of rural New York and Vermont pilgrims.

At the conclusion of our grilled cheese lunch, I shared with Sister Carol that I didn't think many folks up our way knew about or were discussing this new cosmology. Sister Carol was wearing many hats at the time, one being exploring the role of their property in Stanfordville, including St. Mary's Convent, in the context of the charism of the Sisters of Charity of New York. She decided to launch a discussion group on the new cosmology at Sisters Hill. Flyers and announcements went out via email to churches, schools, and agencies in Dutchess County and about twenty-five curious folks showed up for our first gathering with dinner at Sisters Hill Farm in May, 2009.

Little did we know that when we started our exploration in that spring of 2009 with the screening of the early release of Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Swimme's film, *Journey of the Universe*, that we would each embark on our own journeys of raised consciousness and social action, experiencing an expansiveness of our awareness of the environment and our critical role in its future. Without explicitly stating such, we experienced the "four elements of Active Hope: gratitude, pain for the world, seeing through new eyes, and bringing forth something new."

For the last ten years, we have met nine or ten times a year at each other's homes and at Sisters Hill Farm to explore writings by Sister Ilia Delio, Thomas Berry, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Teilhard de Chardin, Pope Francis, and others. One of our group would lead the discussion for the evening and everyone brought something to share at dinner. We would meet about 5:15, preferably ending no later than 8pm, with some of us journeying over a hundred miles to attend, and most driving twenty to forty miles each way. We have traveled to lectures featuring Sister Ilia Delio and Cardinal Turkson, shared articles found online and in print, signed up for relevant newsletters on ecology and earth sustainability, sent links to each other about new writings in the field or mind-enhancing photographs of the universe.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the group has been the manner in which it raised consciousness about how environmental and justice issues impact our lives and what we can do about them as individuals; often nothing spectacular just incremental changes. One member of the group, a retired science teacher, started a four part presentation on *Laudato Si'* last year at two parishes in Vermont which has led to her appointment as liaison from those two parishes to *Vermont Interfaith Power and Light*. Another has incorporated the thinking of the new cosmology in his prison ministry. Another has published a series of articles on local water problems. One member, in his mid-80's, resumed teaching in a college lifelong learning program to rethink justice and crime issues. Another member introduced ecology themes into women's retreat programs at her local parish.

As one member has said, "Joining this cosmology discussion group has plummeted me into contemplating a larger universe, created by a Cosmic Christ who bears me in a wider, stronger connection to the earth and its creatures, its human beings." For another, "members of this group have nourished me with food, thoughts, insights, and support. Our conversation has explored what it means to be part of a 13.8 billion year evolving universe in light of our faith."

When I was a student at St. Gabriel's High School in New Rochelle and the College of Mount Saint Vincent in Riverdale during the 1950's, we were always praying for Mother Elizabeth Seton's canonization. The whole process for such an honor was often explained, including the statement that the order of nuns that Elizabeth Seton had founded had survived and this was a contributing miracle for her cause. I have often thought that it is a miracle of sorts that a rural based group such as ours, exploring the new cosmology, has survived, persisted, and in a quiet way, thrived. Without doubt, that is due in large part to the energy and vision of Sister Carol De Angelo, SC. and the Sisters of Charity, but also to the unspoken connectedness across the years of those of us educated in Sisters of Charity schools who have remained friends together with adventures in grace.





## 'MARTHAS' GARDEN'

*An Experience in  
Integral Ecology*

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Article written in collaboration with  
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One of the four priorities arising from the 2018 General Assembly of the CRC is "Promote bold initiatives in favour of an integral ecology and an economy of communion."

This article is a brief account about such an initiative by the Sisters of Saint Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. It is also about the congregational journey that led to the project. Known as the "Marthas" in Atlantic Canada as well as on their website<sup>1</sup> this congregation had a peak membership of 460 in 1962. Now they number at 85 members.

I chose this topic because I believe their project demonstrates how congregations in diminishment can draw on the resources of their lived charism, their material and spiritual gifts, and the broader social and theological perspectives with which we now view the world, to create a collaboration that concretely demonstrates integral ecology and 'economy of communion.'

**New Growers — the Project**

The "New Growers" project is a gardening apprenticeship program for young adults who want to learn how to do small scale, economically viable gardening. It is hosted on the Marthas' Motherhouse (Bethany) lands, which have rich soil with a history of mixed farming. Two acres of land are devoted to the program, now in its sixth season.

The Marthas have entered into a partnership with two well-established organic farmers, who mentor up to four prospective new farmers each year. The congregation provides the land, buildings and equipment as well underwriting the educational costs. The mentors coordinate the program, and liaison with the congregation is through the Martha Justice Ministry co-ordinator, who in turn works in collaboration with a core group of sisters and lay members.<sup>2</sup>

**Preparing the Soil...  
the Congregational Journey**

Although the New Growers program began six years ago, the community journey that led to it began some time before that. In retracing it, one can see the co-cultivation of broadening worldviews, expanding theological horizons, and intentional implementation in concrete projects; it was a process that grew like a well-balanced mixed garden.

To begin, there was a history of farming on the land. The farm operation had ended in 1970, though smaller scale gardening continued on the property.

In the 1990's, the congregation began to explore in study sessions the insights of Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest and anthropologist, who studied new discoveries in science and viewed life as emerging from a single source; all creation is interconnected. He saw the unfolding of the living universe as sacred story, which he named the Universe Story. "Growing into an awareness of this unfolding mystery and our oneness with it has been a major focus in the Martha's journey with the Universe Story."<sup>3</sup>

In 2001, an environmental assessment of Motherhouse buildings and lands was conducted. This was the basis for further decisions about the 370 acres of mixed-use lands owned by the congregation.

<sup>1</sup> [www.themarthas.com](http://www.themarthas.com)

<sup>2</sup> The 'Marthas' did a panel presentation at the JPIC Ontario meeting November 21-22, 2018, on the current structure and functioning of the Martha Justice Ministry, and how it has evolved in the past several years.

<sup>3</sup> See Marthas' website, Universe Story.



## Five Strategic Directions

In 2002, an Environmental Assessment Resource Committee, which became the Martha Ecology Committee, and in 2015 part of the integrated Martha Justice Ministry, was established to facilitate implementation of the assessment recommendations. Working with consultants, this group set five strategic directions. They were the following: 1) Celebrating and deepening the consciousness of connectedness. 2) Embracing the contemplative dimension of life. 3) Land planning and management. 4) Living in right relationship with all creation. 5) Collaborating and networking with others.

The purpose of the Ecology Committee was to carry out the Chapter 2009 mandate to deepen awareness of the Universe Story, continue ongoing development and implementation of the five strategic directions and to explore more deeply the Christian tradition of creation within the Universe Story.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Bethany Retreat Centre was committed to supporting the mandate in its retreats and programs.

Seven years ago, while on a retreat, Florence Kennedy, csm saw the documentary film *Dirt*, which highlights the crucial importance of soil in the living organism Earth.<sup>5</sup> It inspired her to look at potential uses of the Congregation's land. This was the spark that led to the establishment of the *New Growers Program*.

<sup>4</sup> See Marthas' website, Ecology Committee.

<sup>5</sup> This award winning 83 minutes documentary film can be viewed and purchased at [www.dirtthemovie.org](http://www.dirtthemovie.org).

<sup>6</sup> These ideas are presented more fully in *Laudato Si'*, Ch. 2, *The Gospel of Creation*, and Ch.4, *Integral Ecology*.

<sup>7</sup> From the 2016 video, *Marthas' Garden*, which can be found on [vimeo.com](http://vimeo.com)

## Sacred Roots...the Theological Journey

In reflecting on this project and the process that led to it, Donna Brady, csm underscores that the scientific discoveries about the origins of the universe urge us to rethink the human relationship with God. She says our understanding of God has been one of a distant God, who sends God's Spirit, or Jesus in the Incarnation. If we see God as present in the sacred, evolving creation process, then everything is a unique expression of some aspect of God. If we want to honor God, we need to honor everything God honors and loves.<sup>6</sup>

While the Marthas have been well connected with the earth in their history, their service has been centered on people and human concerns. Now is the time to expand this same love and care to all of creation, which is in great need of tending so that a right relationship with the human community can be restored. She sees the garden project as a small effort in this direction.<sup>7</sup>

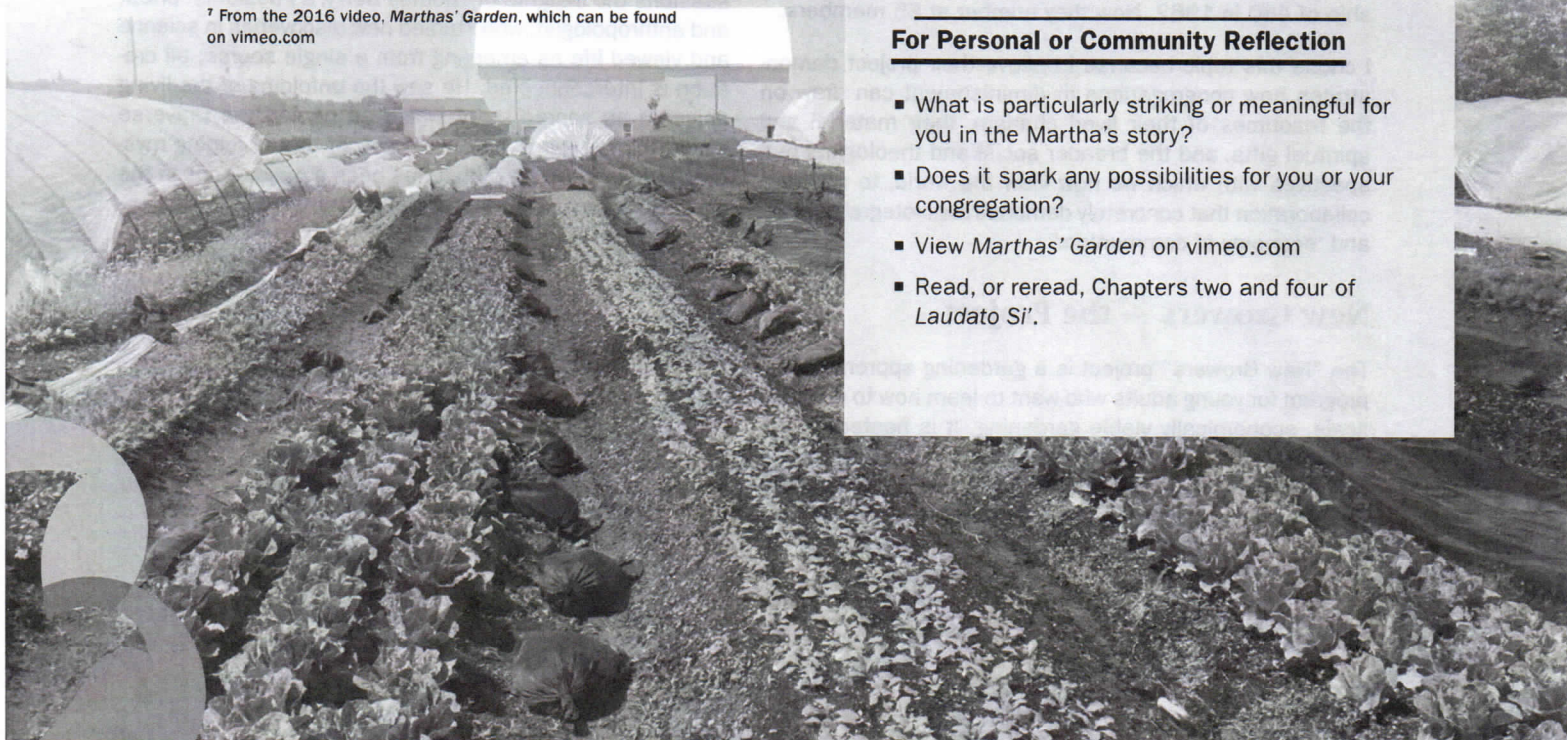
## Conclusion

A thousand words on paper cannot adequately capture what has been such a living, evolving process. For a more thorough, engaging and delightful presentation, view the approximately fourteen minute video *Marthas' Garden*. You will find it a rewarding quarter hour, or maybe half hour, because you may want to watch it again. ■

*Marthas' Garden* / Photo: Sister Florence Kennedy, csm

### For Personal or Community Reflection

- What is particularly striking or meaningful for you in the Martha's story?
- Does it spark any possibilities for you or your congregation?
- View *Marthas' Garden* on [vimeo.com](http://vimeo.com)
- Read, or reread, Chapters two and four of *Laudato Si'*.





## Save Our Endangered Species - Earth Day 2019

“Humanity is part of a vast, evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life’s evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern for all peoples. The protection of Earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust. (*The Earth Charter*, Preamble)

Sung Prayer: Canticle of the Sun – Marty Haugen

Refrain: The heavens are telling the glory of God  
And all creation is shouting for joy.  
Come, dance in the forest,  
Come, play in the field  
And sing, sing to the glory of [our God].

### Psalm 93 & 95

You have put on beautiful clothes, Holy One—  
This amazing universe!  
You have made the nothingness solid  
with an intricate web of laws  
And brought life into being by your love  
to evolve its own forms and find its own heart.  
From everlasting to everlasting you Are.

Louder than the pounding waves  
Larger than the sea  
Is your voice whispering, still and small, in our hearts.  
You created this beautiful, astounding world—  
from the caverns below to the heights of her mountains above.  
Seas and land, core and stars,  
The life in it and on it.  
Awesome. Amazing. Wonderful.



More wonderful still—to know myself as  
a child of the universe--yours.”

I wait for your voice  
Open my heart to you.  
And ask to rest in your love.

*(Tr. Christine Robinson. May 11, 2006)*

## Reading

“A cancer cell is a normal cell disconnected from its genetic memory, cut off from the wisdom of millions of years of evolutionary development. It experiences itself as separate from the body, overpopulates and consumes the organism which supports it. Cancer eventually kills itself by consuming its own environment.” (Brian Patrick, science writer)

➤ It what way am I called to heal earth’s cancer cells in the area where I live?

## Silent Moments

### Prayer to Our Lady of the Fields

ALL: Our Lady of the Fields,  
The Seed of your womb  
Is the Hope of the earth.  
Help us sow this Seed  
To all those in need.

V. In the soil of sorrow,  
R. Help us sow fields of comfort.

V. In the dry ground of discrimination,  
R. Help us sow fields of rich harmony.

V. In the hard clay of doubt and despair,  
R. Help us sow abundant fields of hope and care.

All: O Mary, Our Lady of the Fields, Pray for us. Amen.  
(Glenmary Home Missioners)

## Silent moments

### Why We Need to Protect Insects

- Insects pollinate most of our plants and flowers and without them, we would not have a stable source of food.
- Insects themselves are a source of food for thousands of other species and humans and without them our global ecosystems would collapse.
- Insects aerate our soil and aid in the process of recycling nutrients for use by other animals including humans.
- Many insect species play a role in keeping harmful insects from destroying and degrading crops.

- In the United States alone, insects contribute at least \$57 billion to the global economy and worldwide, these same services total around \$1.75 trillion.

### Small Group Reflection Questions

- “Charity is the cement which binds Communities to God and persons to one another.” Vincent de Paul – 1581-1660
  - How am I bound in charity to the community of Earth’s beings and structure? Have I allowed by self to be cemented in love to the health of the environment I call home? Pray: The heavens are telling the glory of God....
- “Live simply, so that all may simply live.” (*Elizabeth Ann Seton - 1774-1821*)
  - What further step into simplicity am I / are we called to take today? Pray: The heavens are telling the glory of God....
- “Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.” “What is the use of a house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?” (*Henry David Thoreau-1837-1862*) Pray: The heavens are telling the glory of God....
- - How have I resigned myself to the influence of the earth? How have we resigned ourselves...? Pray: The heavens are telling the glory of God....
- “In nature, nothing exists alone.” (*Rachel Carson, 1907-1964*)
  - “Because all creatures are connected each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us living creatures are dependent on one another.” (*Laudato Si, Chapter 1 – May 24, 2015*)
  - In what ways do I strive for inter-dependence, inter-connectivity with Earth and Earth’s people?

*Canticle of The Sun*

Marty Haugen

Refrain: The heavens are telling the glory of God  
 And all creation is shouting for joy  
 Come, dance in the forest,  
       come, play in the field,  
 And sing, sing to the glory of [our God].