

Congregation of St. Joseph of Peace Spring 2011 Assembly  
To Enhance the Beauty of the Whole: A CSJP Spirituality of the Care of Creation  
by Terrence J. Moran, CSJP-A

First I would like to express my deep gratitude for the privilege of being with you for these assemblies. A special blessing was being able to visit Rearsby for the first time. CSJPs usually talk about Rearsby with the same reverential tones that are usually reserved for the Kingdom of Oz and now I can add my voice to the chorus. I have an even deeper gratitude for the privilege it is to be a CSJP associate and to be involved with a group that is interested in doing something so significant in the world – a time when unfortunately other elements in the Church are frittering away their energy on things that are much less consequential.

The goals of the Assembly come from the work of the Care for Creation Chapter group. The purpose of the Assembly:

- ☞ To deepen our Spirituality of Peace regarding the Chapter Act on Care of Creation and Climate Change.
- ☞ To show the roots of the Chapter Act in our faith tradition and in our CSJP history and spirituality.
- ☞ To deepen our consciousness that we are called not just to changes in our behavior but to a new imagining of our relationship to God, to Earth, to one another.
- ☞ To show how the Chapter Act on Care of Creation and Climate Change relates to our commitment to Non-violent Peacemaking and supports our living into the reality of being a Congregation without provinces.

We are called to address climate change not because it's a trendy issue or politically correct but because we are impelled by our faith tradition and our charism. In this assembly we

want to dive deep – into the mysteries of our faith and the energies of our charism that underpin this Chapter Act. We want to draw connections between the chapter acts on care of creation and non-violence. Mother Clare was a great connector – many founders worked for the poor; very few were able to make connections like she did between the realities of poverty and the religious, social and economic systems that make them possible. The title of the Assembly “To Enhance the Beauty of the Whole,” is taken from a quotation from Mother Clare’s work on religious life, *The Spouse of Christ*:



*“You may perhaps have heard the story of Linnaeus, the famous botanist, who, when he saw a field of gorse for the first time, knelt down to thank God. The rare beauty of the mass of golden yellow flowers, the exquisite perfume that floated from them scenting the summer breeze, when seen and felt for the first time, drew the soul with more than common ardor to adore the Creator of the glorious scene.*”



*“As each flower in the field of gorse contributed to the beauty of the whole, as the perfume of each mingled itself with the perfume of its companions, and*

*so helped to form the rich essence which was borne afar upon the breeze, so also in our convent-homes, each soul has its own beauty which enhances the beauty of the rest...”*

(Sister Francis Clare Cusack, *The Spouse of Christ*, 50-51)

Mother Clare, in her own time, grasped intuitively a fundamental truth of ecological consciousness. In the famous words of Thomas Berry – “you can’t tell the story of anything without telling the story of everything.” Each being has a beauty that enhances the beauty of the rest; each being contributes to the beauty of the whole.

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## COMING HOME TO THE UNIVERSE STORY



**W**e are going to begin by rooting ourselves in the story of the whole; in a contemplative ritual

of the universe story that makes connections with our Christian and CSJP stories.

As we engage in this ritual, pay attention to anything that stirs in you, intrigues you, disturbs or puzzles you.

### **A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment**

by Connie Barlow

(adapted by Terrence Moran, CSJP-A)

#### **Environment for the Ritual**

Two tables are need – one in a central place visible to all where the ritual items will be placed; another, off to the side, where things can be kept before they are needed. Speakers will need microphones.

Items needed:

- ◆ meditation bell
- ◆ small dishes of glitter
- ◆ sun candle
- ◆ shell and large bowl
- ◆ branches for sprinkling
- ◆ dirt
- ◆ incense stick
- ◆ a piece of chocolate (e.g. a chocolate kiss) and/or fruit (e.g. a seedless grape, strawberry or orange slice) for each participant.
- ◆ a digging stick
- ◆ 2 large stones
- ◆ pita bread
- ◆ a white plate that can be blackened in the candle fire

**NB.** *The Leader announces the title of each section.*

## 1. The Great Radiance



*The bell is sounded.*

**Leader:** "In the beginning is the Great Radiance. In a moment of grace, all of Space, all of Time, and all Energy flares forth from the primordial Mystery. From this Great Radiance, 13.7 billion years ago, the Universe will begin its Great Journey. What creativity will unfold? What wonders will emerge in the billions of years before us?"

**Reader:** Hidden in this fertile womb of creative energy are the elements that will form the Incarnation, Jesus of Nazareth, Prince of Peace.

**Leader:** "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the Great Radiance."

**Response:** "We are grateful for the Great Radiance. We are awed by the Mystery from which the Universe flares forth."

## 2. The Birth of Galaxies & Stars



**Leader:** "As the Energy of the Great Radiance expands and cools, matter emerges and congeals into clouds of hydrogen. These coalesce into the communion of galaxies — billions of galaxies. At a moment of grace [BELL], the first stars ignite within these galaxies, fueled by the marriage of matter and gravity, fusing the abundant hydrogen into helium. And then the biggest stars go further, forging all the chemical elements within their bellies and then offering their gifts in the blinding bursts of supernovas. All the calcium in our bones, all the iron in our blood, all the carbon and nitrogen and oxygen in our DNA: all these elements are forged in the bellies of giant stars."

**Reader:** Here are present all the elements that will make up the body of Margaret Anna Cusack; the elements that will feed the chemical processes that will fuse her generous heart, her active intelligence.

*Several participants will be chosen to anoint the heads of the others with "stardust"/glitter. The anointers spread the glitter on the forehead of each participant while saying, "You are a child of the stars, made of stardust."*

### 3. Lighting the Sun



*A large candle is carried into the prayer space.*

**Leader:** "Among the hundreds of billions of galaxies can be found a lovely spiral galaxy, the Milky Way, where second-generation stars are swirling into being from the rich brew of supernova stardust. One of these is our star, the Sun, and its nine planetary pups and their moons, who came into being 4.6 billion years ago in a moment of grace [BELL]. Our Sun is too small to become a supernova, but it will provide its nearby planets with a secure and steady banquet of warmth and light, day in and day out, for billions and billions of years. Oh what creativity will arise in this new star system!"

**Reader:** Imagine Sister Francis Clare Cusack in front of a group of working girls in the school in Knock. Her hand that traces a word on the blackboard; the eyes of the students who see it and their brains that process this information; this entire process of education is fueled by energy from the sun. The sun is an active and

irreplaceable participant in every ministry of education.

**Leader:** In our hearts we call forth gratitude for our star, the Sun."

**Response:** "We are grateful for our star, the Sun, whose generosity lights up the sky."

### 4. The First Rain



*A participant pours a pitcher of water slowly and noisily from on high into a glass bowl.*

**Leader:** "On planet Earth, third stone from the Sun, there occurs a moment of grace as the planet cools: water condenses from the steamy atmosphere, and rain falls for the first time. Rain falls and falls. The oceans fill and begin to respond to the moon, rolling with the tides, and rivers flow through the ever-flowing continents".

**Reader:** They are all here: the waters of Dublin's canals where young Margaret Cusack played, the waters of the Ring of Kerry, the

waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, of New York Harbor and of Lake Washington, the river waters of the Hudson and the Columbia, all the waters crossed in mission by the Community of St. Joseph of Peace. The tears Mother Francis Clare shed in joy, anger, frustration, prayer; all these waters are here.

**Leader:** "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the gift of liquid water."

**Response:** "We are grateful for the rains and rivers and oceans of Earth."

### 5. The Emergence of Life

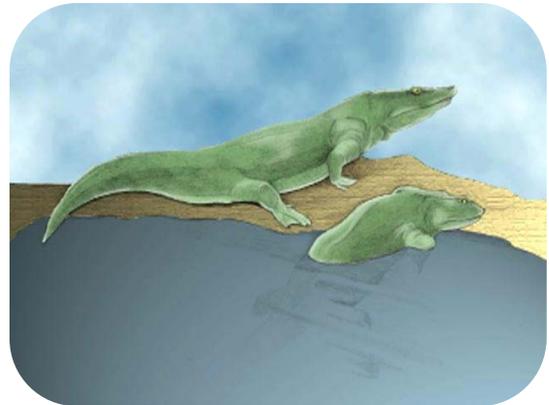


**Leader:** "The rain cycles between ocean, continent, and atmosphere. Rain running off rock carries vital salts and minerals into the ocean waters, while magma continues to refresh Earth's crust. In a moment of grace [BELL], emerging from rock and water, the first living cell pulses into existence some 3 billion years ago. From that cell will evolve all the creatures of the sea. Forever after, life on Earth will build cells and bodies from the earth's elements and liquid water."

**Reader:** These first living cells are fused with the energy of Incarnation. In them the Word made flesh already stirs.

*Participants are sprinkled with water.*

### 6. The Coming onto Land



**Leader:** "The oceans teem with bacteria, algae, jellyfish, sponges, trilobites, urchins, and fishes. Some of the fishes live in shallow coves, their fins becoming sturdy pegs for scuttling along the bottom like crabs. In a moment of grace [BELL], some 350 million years ago, some of these fishes venture out onto land, pulling and pushing themselves with their peg-like fins. And so the first amphibians are born. Our limbs still bear the traces of our four-finned ancestry."

*Dirt is poured into the bowl full of water so that mud forms.*

**Leader:** "We are creatures of rock and soil, merged with water. Let us stand now, rise up with our amphibian ancestors, struggling against the pull of gravity to celebrate the gift of sturdy limbs. [Pause]"

*The leader gestures to all to stand.*

**Leader:** Let us breathe deeply now, breathe with our amphibian ancestors to celebrate our inheritance of lungs and the freshness of air.

*Pause while all take a few deep breaths.*

**Reader:** Here is born the voice of Jesus. Here is born the voice that will speak of the blessedness of the peacemakers. Here began the breath of peace that the Risen Jesus sent forth over the apostles. Here began the voice of protest raised by Mother Francis Clare over poverty, injustice and the oppression of women.

### 7. The Emergence of Mammals



**Leader:** "Please be seated. In a moment of grace, [BELL] amphibians give rise to reptiles whose eggs can withstand the stress of dry air. Out of the reptiles will come dinosaurs, birds, and mammals. The dinosaurs easily claim the continents, the birds the skies. Meanwhile, the mammals stay small and wary for tens of millions of years, adapted to a life of darting from one safe burrow to the next, favoring the cover of night. Creatures of darkness, our ancestors develop a powerful sense of smell. Even today, odors call forth within us emotions and memories deeper than the realm of reason and word. . . deeper than the realm of sight and sound. Deeper than the realm of reason and

word; deeper than the realm of sight and sound." *(A participant lights an incense stick and walks around to disperse the aroma. Pause while people experience the smell).*

**Reader:** Imagine Mother Francis Clare at prayer in the chapel at Kenmare, breathing in and out the incense laden air. The sense of presence that she experiences, the peace, was born here.

### 8. Into the Trees



**Leader:** "I ask you now to close your eyes. 65 million years ago, a great meteor flares forth from the heavens, crashing to Earth, turning day into night for many months. There is darkness ...darkness ... utter darkness. The plants die, the dinosaurs die, the little mammals huddle and hibernate in burrows. And when the sunlight returns, the mammals begin to come out of their burrows. Open your eyes to what is now around you, the devastation, the vacancy of life.

The Great Radiance of Mammals is about to begin, and you are a part of it! Your descendants

will co-evolve with the buzzing insects, the fluttering birds, the colorful flowers!



One lineage of mammal will take to the trees. A *participant holds up the branch and adds it to the prayer space*. These are the primates. Feel your eyes moving from the sides of your head to the front of your face, allowing you to see depth. Now you can leap flawlessly from branch to branch. Your heritage of night vision evolves to accommodate the colors of day, allowing your descendents to one day gasp in the presence of a rainbow. All the while, paws for scampering and burrowing are becoming instruments for grasping. I invite you now to take in the wonder of your hands. Admire your supple primate hands with your depth-perceiving, color sensitive eyes. Know that all these were forged in the welcoming branches of trees... trees: our cherished partners in evolution."



**Reader:** Mother Francis Clare's hands – hands that clasped the hands of Mother Evangelista in friendship; hands that moved with animation as she spoke; hands that clothed novices in the habit of Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace: hands that pushed pens across thousands of manuscript pages; hands that built and blessed; those hands born here.

**Leader:** "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the trees of the forest that sheltered and challenged our primate ancestors."

**Response:** "We are grateful for our partners in evolution: the glorious trees."

*Plates are passed through the assembly with pieces of chocolate and pieces of fruit.*

**Leader:** "I invite you now to take a piece of chocolate and a piece of fruit. While still in the trees, our ancestors partake of food that the trees provide: leaves and seeds and fruits. The trees respond, in turn, luring us by sweetening the pulp of fruit so we might, unaware, disperse

their seeds. Our bodies respond, too: we evolve a yearning for fruits and a tongue that can alert us to bitter plant poisons. Let us now eat this chocolate and fruit together with joy, and give thanks for the co-evolutionary dance of plants and primates."



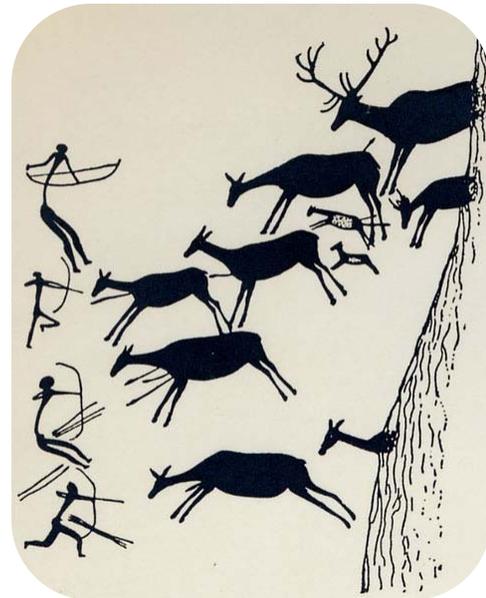
## 9. Out of the Trees

**Leader:** "As the climate dries in our original Eden, the African forest opens into savannah. Our primate ancestors spend less and less time in the trees and more and more time on the ground, where they search for insects and dig for roots and tubers. Might the digging sticks that ferret out the yam and the carrot be the first human tools?"

*Participant mimics digging with the stick.*

**Reader:** All the tools of the craftsman Joseph find their beginning here; all the tools, all the instruments of art and music, from quill pens to printing presses to computers, every technology of healing, every tool of education –every resource used in the ministries of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Peace is born here.

## 10. Time of the Hunt



**Leader:** "Some digging sticks now become weapons, tipped with chipped stones. With these we set out on the communal hunt. Is it the hunt that urges us to sign to one another, and then to speak to one another? Whatever the impetus, we know that in a moment of grace, symbolic language emerges in the human, and with it our capacity to teach and learn from one another and sing songs of thanksgiving

**Reader:** The voice of the Word made flesh – parables and beatitudes, comfort and challenge, prayer and protest – all were born here.

**Leader:** We celebrate the gift of speech by raising our voices in song:

**This is holy ground.  
We're standing on holy ground.  
For our God is present  
And where God is, is holy.  
This is holy ground  
We're standing on holy ground**

For our God is present  
And where God is is holy

### 11. Firemakers



*Participant strikes two stones together.*

**Leader:** "Humans learn to harness and maintain flames lit by lightning. Later, we discover how to beckon fire to appear whenever and wherever we wish. We become the firemakers. Do we feel Earth trembling with foreboding? With fire we can now flush game, alter the landscape, preserve meat, fend off predators, keep warm, and roast away toxins from seed and tuber."

### 12. Farmers



*Baskets of pita bread broken into small pieces are passed through the assembly.*

**Leader:** I invite you now to pass the bread and take a piece for yourself. About 10,000 years ago, in a moment of grace, [BELL] our kind learns not only how to find and prepare seeds, but how to plant and nurture them. Humans can now stay in one place year after year and in densities never before possible. As you take and eat this grain, speak in reverence the names of the homelands where your forebears tilled the soil."

*Participants say aloud the names of the homelands of their ancestors.*

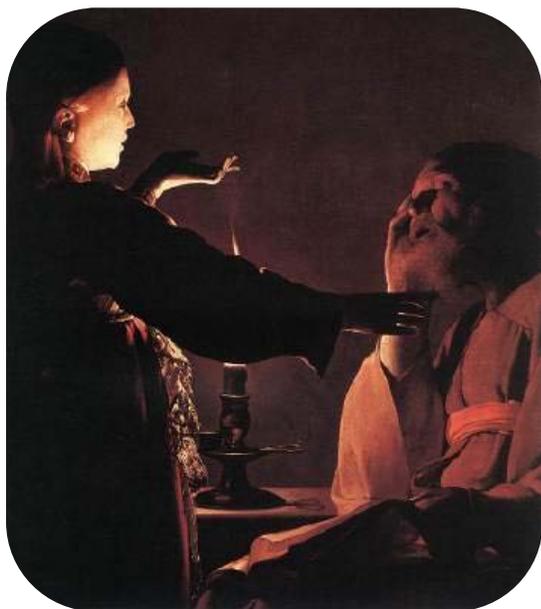
### 13. The Desecration of Earth



**Leader:** "We come to today and the awful truth that in humans, inventiveness often outpaces wisdom and restraint. As Thomas Berry has written, "The glory of the human has become the desecration of Earth. The desecration of Earth is becoming the destiny of the human." [pause] Farmed and overgrazed soils are washing into the sea. Earth's fire makers are now burning fuels in such abundance that we are

changing the very composition of the atmosphere — blackening our souls. *A plate is held over the fire until soot is formed. A participant shows it to the group.* We are driving into extinction the biotic richness of this beautiful Earth What can be done? What can be done?

#### 14. Reclaiming the Past, Revisioning the Future



[BELL] **Leader:** "What is to be done? What is to be done? Our patron Joseph listened to a dream that showed him the solution to what seemed an impossible impasse. With Joseph, we can now dream the dream of the Earth. We can respond as Earth participating in its own healing. At the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, we answered these questions with the following words:

**ALL:** Earth is a revelation of God and the sustainer of all life. We recognize that the exploitation and destruction of Earth's air, water, soil and species is a sacrilege.

We are committed to a spirituality of peacemaking which compels us to live in right relationship with the entire community of life. In this way we engage in the struggle against the reality of evil and continue the work of establishing God's reign of justice and peace.

**Leader:** I invite you all now to close your eyes and meditate in silence on what our contributions might be. What is Earth dreaming through us? What is Earth beckoning forth? What is Earth calling forth from the Associates and Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Peace?

*Pause for silent reflection opened and closed by the bell.*

**Leader:** "To conclude this ceremony, let us sing an old earth-centered chant with an awareness of the new cosmology. Let us retrieve the deep relationship our ancestors had with the soil, the air, the fire, and the water. And let us replenish these concepts with the awesome wonder and intimacy we now can draw from the new story, the Story of the Great Journey."

**Singer** leads group in singing:

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water (2x each line)  
renew, renew, renew, renew.  
The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water  
renew, renew, renew, renew.

## Reflection, Integration and Sharing:

1. How does it *feel* to you to experience the Christian and CSJP stories through the lens of the Universe story?
2. What new insights into our spirituality of peace through justice well up in you through your participation in this ritual?

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### PRESENTATION I: “To Enhance the Beauty of the Whole: The Christian Tradition”



I think we often wonder what we can do, as individuals, as members of a Congregation that is rather modest in size, what can we do in the face of a huge reality like climate change/global warming? Most of us are not scientists or architects of new earth-friendly technologies. I received a great deal of consolation and insight a few years ago listening to Brian Swimme as keynoter of a conference for spiritual directors. He was addressing a similar question – what

role can spiritual directors have in responding to the ecological catastrophe that we face. (Incidentally, Brian Swimme also mentioned sixteen people whom he thought were leaders in bringing the world to a new ecological consciousness. One of them was our own Sister Alexandra Kovats, of whom we should be very proud.) This was his answer:

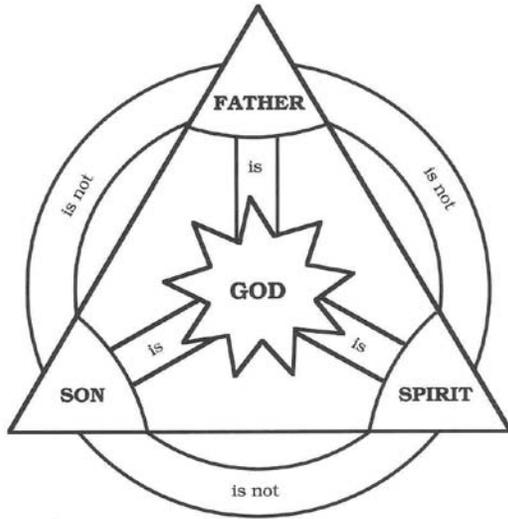
We live in a time of major change and major denial about that change. Scientific information is plentiful and accurate. The problem is not information; the problem is that information is not penetrating human consciousness. Thus the central challenge is not scientific but spiritual. What happens when that scientific information starts to penetrate? The fundamental religious story of Western culture blocks it – the story that says that the universe is a collection of objects rather than a community of kin. The task of spirituality is to deconstruct the maladaptive story that humans are living out of. The central task of spirituality is to create a culture that amplifies life’s hum.

So the crisis is not primarily about solar panels and energy efficient cars; it’s a spiritual crisis – and that is an area that we know something about. And doesn’t Brian give a beautiful description of what our central task is – to create a culture that amplifies life’s hum.

The theologian Elizabeth Johnson uses the beautiful image of a religious truth being like a bell and the needs of the age are like the mallet that strikes the bell. The bell holds all sorts of tones in itself which are only released when the needs of the age strike it. Our new evolutionary, ecological consciousness can strike the bell of

our religious truths and bringing sounds out of them that we perhaps have never heard before. She says we need to find ways to make the symbols sing again: Let's listen to a few of them and try to hear a new song.

### TRINITY



**D**orothy Sayers, the British mystery writer, was also a devout Christian and among her writings is a spoof of the catechism; using the real catechism questions and giving the answers that people really believe. This is what she says about the Trinity:

“What is the Holy Trinity?” “The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, the whole damned thing incomprehensible. Something put in by theologians to make it more difficult -- nothing to do with daily life or ethics.”

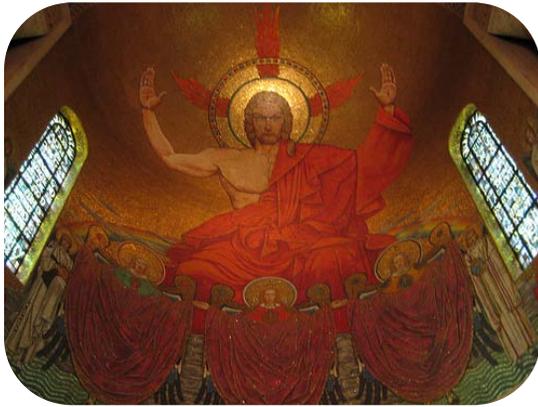
In a similar way, in the big picture book that was published for the 75<sup>th</sup> of the Congregation shows a group of novices in class in the former

Our Lady Province. They have looks of intense concentration on their faces, wrapped in starched linen. Their pens in hand, poised above their notebooks as the Jesuit professor says, “Now let’s buckle down to the Trinity, Sisters!” The illustration above, found in many of the catechisms that we learned or taught from, made the Trinity seem like an impossible geometry problem with triangles and circles and arrows.

I invite us to look contemplatively at another image of the Trinity, one that I think is much more in accord with what the new cosmology tells us about the nature of reality. It’s the famous icon of the Trinity by the Russian monk, Andrei Rublev.

Rublev lived in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Russia at that time was not a country but a loose confederation of principalities and fiefdoms whose rulers were constantly at war with one another to conquer new territory. This same time is also the beginning of the European conquest of the Americas, which will wreck havoc on hundreds of thousands of indigenous people and their cultures. In such a violent chaotic time, it would be natural to look to a God who was the mightiest of all, the biggest Lord, with the largest club who could whack this fractious mob into obedience. Indeed the iconographic tradition of the East with familiar with just such an image of God – God the Pantocrator– the “ruler of all.” The next slide depicts just such an image, perhaps familiar to many of us, from the apse of the National Basilica Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. The image of Jesus is massive and muscular and dwarfs the figures at his feet.

His gaze is angry; there are literally bolts of lightning emanating from his head.



But in an amazing burst of contemplative depth and genius, this is not the image that Rublev created to restore order to his violent society.



He takes his inspiration from the story in Genesis 18 where Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality to three mysterious strangers and discover that they have entertained angels unaware. Rublev goes farther and says that these three hungry strangers are a manifestation

of the Holy Three, of the Triune God. Rublev makes a remarkable contention – that the Divine is manifested not in coercive power and the ability to control but rather in need, in vulnerability, in hunger and thirst.

To review briefly the power symbolism present in the icon:

The figure on the left is the Father. The Father is the invisible and ineffable source of divinity; no one has even seen the Father so this figure is painted in muted earth tones that almost blend into the background of the image. The Father looks with a gaze of incredible tenderness and mutuality toward the central figure – the Word. This figure is dressed in red and blue – blue the color of the sky, of the heavens, of divinity; red, the color of earth, of clay, of blood, of humanity. This figure returns the gaze of the Father, the gaze of tender mutuality. The fingers of the Word are extended in a gesture of blessing. How richly blessed is the created universe through the reality of an Incarnate, flesh-taking God, in whom heaven and earth are wed. The third figure is the Spirit. The Spirit is depicted in green – the color of springtime, of growth, of vitality. The Spirit is the greening energy of God. The Spirit, while deeply present to the companions at the table, directs a gaze outward and downward. In the Spirit the divine energy searches the cosmos for people and places that are in need of greening power, of the flourishing of life where it is threatened or diminished.

Rublev communicates so beautifully an image of God in whom there is both individuality and unity and they are not in competition. The flourishing of each person of the Trinity means the flourishing of the whole “each enhances the

beauty of the whole,” to use Mother Clare’s lovely words.

There is no coercive violence or domineering power in the Trinity. God is mutuality, conversation, interdependence. In our childhood catechism, we were told that humans were in the image and likeness of God because we shared with God the powers of intellect and will. Thus to discover our resemblance to the divine, we were to look inward, to the powers of our soul. Rublev shows that we image God in our capacity to relationship. Each of the persons of the Trinity is in complete and full openness to the others and to creation. The more we are in conscious relationships of mutual interdependence with all creation, the more image of God shines resplendent in us.

The outward energy of God is the greening power of the spirit. God is experienced in the flourishing of life. When we amplify life’s hum we are engaged in a most profoundly spiritual act, a religious act. And so in our Chapter Act on Care for Creation and Climate Change, we are committing our energy and resources and aligning them with the greening power of the Holy Spirit. When we meet in CSGs we are not just enjoying each other’s company and talking and eating pizza. We are engaging in an activity that is deeply Trinitarian. We are training our gaze as a congregation to look where the Spirit is looking.

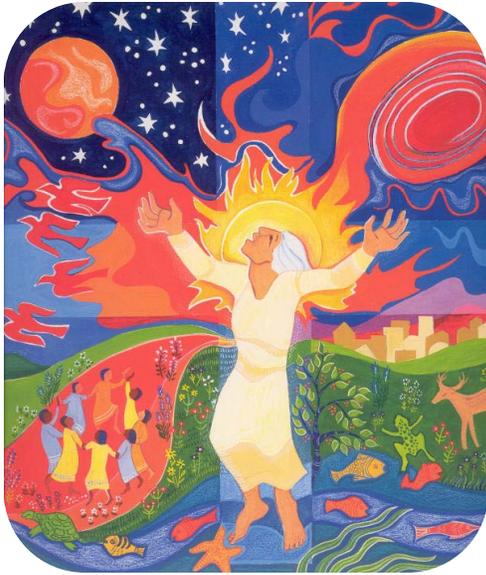
The subject of the divine conversation is the cup at the center of the table; a cup which contains the image of the paschal lamb as well. God’s incessant conversation, God’s eternal concern is nourishment, giving food to the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, the abundant flourishing of life; a creation which is at heart Eucharistic;

where every being says to every other being – my body, my blood, take and eat. Recall some of the most famous words of the Nun of Kenmare, “They accused me of being involved in politics. God help me, the only politics I cared about were feeding the hungry.” Feeding the hungry – the politics of the Trinity.

As a wonderful theologian from Notre Dame who died too young of cancer, Catherine Mowry LaCunga, has written: “God is essentially relational, ecstatic, fecund, alive as passionate love.”

The American poet Emily Dickinson invites us to re-imagine the sign of the cross by praying, “In the name of the bee and of the butterfly and of the breeze. Amen.”

Every time we make the sign of the cross we are proclaiming our relationship not only to the Triune God of our Christian faith, but in and through that profession of faith, to everything that exists from the smallest subatomic particle to the most massive distant galaxy. We are a universe of kin, held and sustained by a God who is a community of passionate and creative love.



## CREATION

This slide shows an image of creation by Sister of St. Joseph Ansgar Holmberg called “God’s Ecstasy.” All reality flows from this ecstatic explosion of the Holy One.

A deep, preconscious, impression about God that most of us picked up in our early formation was that God is outside and separate from creation. Ask any child to point to where God is and he or she will point upwards. Similarly they will point downwards, to earth, to indicate the location of hell or the devil. As so for the human to become more like God would mean becoming less involved in earth. When we entered religious life before Vatican II, it was commonly said we were “leaving the world.” I don’t know where we thought we were going and whatever the world was we soon discovered that it has the pesky tendency of coming with us. To this day, none of us would compliment a religious by saying she is “worldly.” Note our physical postures when we hear the words, “let us pray.” Typically we close our eyes, bow our

heads – we leave the world to go inward. While our ideas and our ways of talking may no longer be so crude; nevertheless there is a rather widespread idea that care of creation, ecology is something that some people are “into” and some are not; that it is an optional extra and that you can live a faithful religious life without any interest in or concern for the fate of the planet and its life-systems. Many people still look at Earth mostly as a stage in which human life takes place. For many people, morality has to do with the human relationship to God and the relationships of humans to one another. We see no moral implications in our relationship to Earth. Perhaps the most appalling example of this attitude I have ever run across comes from Dr. Geoffrey Fischer, who was the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury in the 50’s and 60’s. This was his moral evaluation of nuclear weapons, in a world that had just witness the unspeakable destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: “The worst the H-Bomb can do is to sweep a vast number of persons at one moment into the other, and more vital world, into which, anyhow, the must all pass at sometime.” The destructive unleashing of the energy of the atom is nothing more than an efficient way of ushering people into eternity.

Because of our misunderstanding of the creation stories in the book of Genesis, we tended to organize all of reality into hierarchies. All beings are related to each other in terms of higher and lower, superior and inferior. It is presumed that the things below exist in large part to serve the interest of the things above. I suspect we all had experiences in school when we felt bad because the person next to us got a 96 on a spelling test and we got a 95. Did you learn to read in classes that had reading groups

in which the top group was “The Eagles” and the lowest “The Crows,”? Well into the 1980’s the *Annuario Pontificio*, the statistical yearbook of the Vatican would list the names of the superiors general of orders of men but not of orders of women. Thus you could discover the name of the head of the Fathers of Mercy who counted a whopping eight members, but not of the Salesian Sisters who numbered 30,000. I’m sure no one ever set down and made that decision. It was just assumed that the name of the leader of a men’s group was ecclesiastically significant information while the name of the leader of a woman’s group was not.

The new cosmology teaches us that creation is not a thing that happened in the past but an event that is still unfolding. It tells us that everything is interrelated and interdependent. As there is no hierarchy in the Trinity neither is there in creation – each being, by being what it is, enhances the beauty of the rest. We cannot understand anything outside of the universe story of which it is a part. We cannot understand the human outside of the community of relationships which makes the human possible.

There is no such thing as an isolated human being except in our flawed imagination. We live as an integral part of a community of earth, air, water, life and to think of ourselves in any other way is suicidal. The psychologist James Hillman has an interesting insight in this regard: “Since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like-to the deep oceans and distant stars.” The new cosmology opens up for us the truth to which our cultural biases have blinded us: that our perception of ourselves

as starting at our skin and moving inward is a decision – and a largely inaccurate one.

We are probably familiar with the Jewish exclamation of delight and congratulations on a happy event, “Mazel Tov!” That word “tov” is exactly the Hebrew word that the Book of Genesis uses to express God’s delight at the end of each day of creation. “God saw that it was good!” – this is not primarily a moral evaluation but rather an ecstatic outburst of delight. There are very pragmatic reasons for care of creation – without a healthy ecosystem, there is no healthy human life. However, our Chapter commitment to care for creation is rooted far deeper. As people of faith, as CSJP sisters and associates, we want to share in God’s own delight in the increasing complexity and diversity of creation. We want to make our own God’s sense of excited delight - “it is so very good!” – in our relationship to Earth.

Thomas Berry says very soberly, “We should be clear about what happens when we destroy the living forms of this planet...we destroy modes of divine presence.” It was in this consciousness that our Chapter Act calls the destruction of creation “sacrilege.”

## INCARNATION

I invite you, as we being our reflection on Incarnation, to look contemplatively on two icons of Incarnation. The first is a picture of a sculpture found in the famous church of St. Martin in the Fields, near Trafalgar Square in London. It shows the birth of a child – the baby boy emerging from the womb of Earth. We are accustomed to saying that a child comes *into* the

world. In actuality, a child comes *out of* the world. We are all the products of a 13.7 billion year unfolding and everything that has come before us has left its trace in us.

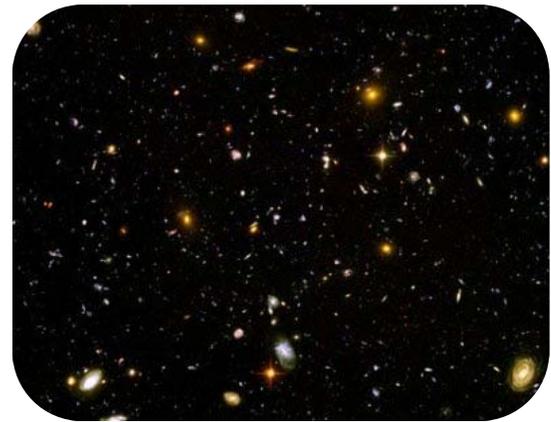


The second icon of the Incarnation is the earliest image of the universe ever captured by the Hubble Space Telescope. It shows the universe just 600 million years after the Big Bang when the universe was just a toddler. This is quite literally a baby picture of all of us. These young galaxies haven't yet formed their familiar spiral or elliptical shapes and are much smaller and quite blue in color. That's mostly because at this stage, they don't contain many heavy metals. So the oxygen and the helium that will someday form part of the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth already exist but the iron that will redden the blood, shed for our salvation, does not. Again for us, as people of faith, this photograph is not merely a scientific curiosity – it is a religious image, it is an icon of the Incarnation in process.

This opens up profound insights for us into the Incarnation, into the God who takes flesh. The enfleshment of God did not take place at one moment in the womb of Mary 2000 years ago. The Incarnation was in process from the first moments of the universe. The hydrogen in the

body of Jesus of Nazareth was created 13.7 billion years ago. The other elements in his body were produced in the explosion of a supernova that produced our solar system and everything in it.

Our faith affirms that Jesus at the end of his life did not merely go back to heaven but rather that he rose in the flesh. The destiny of the whole universe is tied up in the mystery of the Incarnation. From this perspective, listen to these words from the Letter to the Colossians (1:15-20)



He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent.

For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

All things in heaven and earth are destined to reconciliation in and through Jesus – something much more profound is going on than “saving my soul” and “going to heaven.”

One of the more interesting works of theology published in recent years is Rita Nakashima Brock’s, *Saving Paradise*. Studying early Christian art she discovered, in her words, that, “it took Jesus 1000 years to die.” The image of the crucifixion that we see as the quintessential Christian symbol was not prominent for the first millennium. She went on to study what was prominent in Christian art. She discovered to her surprise:

“Paradise, we realized, was the dominant image of early Christian sanctuaries... To our surprise and delight, we discovered that early Christian paradise was something other than “heaven” or the afterlife. Our modern views of heaven and paradise think of them as a world after death. However, in the early church, paradise—first and foremost—was this world, permeated and blessed by the Spirit of God. It was on the earth. Images of it in Rome and Ravenna captured the craggy, scruffy pastoral landscape, the orchards, the clear night skies, and teeming waters of the Mediterranean world, as if they were lit by a power from within. Sparkling mosaics in vivid colors captured the world’s luminosity. The images filled the walls of spaces in which liturgies fostered aesthetic, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual experiences of life in the present, in a world created as good and delightful.

Like the breathing of a human body, the images said that God blessed the earth with the breath of Spirit. It permeated the entire cosmos and

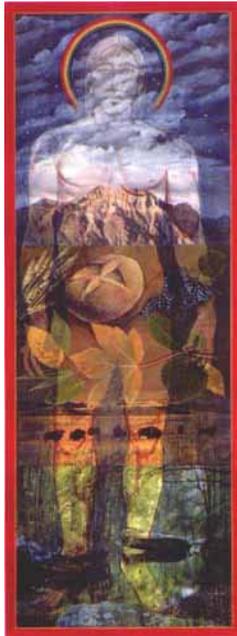
made paradise the salvation that baptism in the Spirit offered. As the most blessed place imaginable, paradise was also where the departed saints rested from their earthly labors and returned to visit those who loved them. In early Christian understandings, even heaven was a dimension of this life; it was the mysterious abode of God from which blessings flowed upon the earth. Nearby to heaven, the dead rested in their own neighborhood of paradise.” (cf. <http://savingparadise.net/>)

The earliest Christian conviction was not merely that our baptism opened to us the gates of heaven, closed by human sinfulness, as perhaps we once learned; rather our baptism empowered us to live in a transformed world here and now. We live as if the world is already paradise.

Karl Rahner in reflecting on the Easter mystery made a similar point; that the resurrection of Jesus is “the embryonically, final beginning of the glorification and divinization of the whole of reality.” Once again our commitment to an ecologically sustainable way of life, our advocacy against global warming, is not only a political act. It is an Easter act. It is a participation in God’s glorification and divinization of the whole of reality.

Similarly, Rahner sees the second coming of Jesus not the return of Jesus to this world as an extra-terrestrial visitor but rather the breaking open of the hidden reality at the heart of all things – the emergence of the Cosmic Christ from the within of things, the One who, in the words of Colossians, “holds all things together.”

## SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION



This slide is a painting of the Cosmic Christ by Connecticut priest and artist, Fr. John Giuliani. It is in a certain sense an artistic attempt to depict the theology of Rahner on which we have reflected. Giuliani sees the created universe as the body of the Risen Jesus. The body of the Risen Christ and the landscape are fused with each other – are transparent to each other. A rainbow forms the halo; the body is transparent to the sky, the mountains, a flock of buffalo grazing on a prairie; Christ's feet are sunk into the rich mud of the wetlands. And from Jesus' gut – the center of a person in the theology of the Old Testament – rather than the heart or the mind for us – arises the wheat and grapes, the bread and wine of Eucharist. One of the greatest insights of our faith tradition is our sacramental imagination – that our most intense experience of contact with the Holy are mediated in and through experience of matter – water, bread, wine, oil, touch, word, love-making.

Many of you have seen the movie “The Queen” which is really a story about the conversion of Queen Elizabeth to a sacramental imagination. The massive communal grief of the English people over the tragic death of “The People's Princess” was expressed externally, sacramentally in the construction of a shrine outside the walls of Kensington Palace. As humans we need to express our inner life in an outward expression. And our sacramental imagination teaches us that we meet the inner life of God in the outward expression of Creation. Created reality is not in competition with God but rather the principal way in which God's inner self is expressed to us.

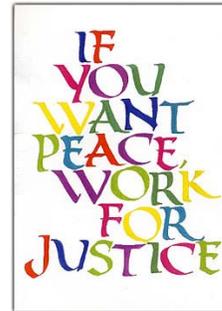
How many of us have heard homilies sounding the alarm over the decline of vocations to the ministerial priesthood - “No priest, no Eucharist?” But why have so few of us heard homilies on something much more fundamental – no clean water, no pure wheat, grapes, olives, no unpolluted air from which we draw our breath to praise God in word – no Eucharist?

Our celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, is meant to transform the way we relate to all created reality. As Thomas Berry has said – we are taught in ethics that we should never treat people as things. But we should not even treat things as things! Reflect on this idea in terms of our Chapter Act on non-violent peacemaking. How often our relationship to things is violent. Have you ever hit or kicked or slammed something because it didn't work the way you wanted it to? It's irrelevant that we don't “hurt” those things (and that it doesn't even succeed in making them work). These actions reveal to us how much violence we hold within and how habitually we look to violence as

the solution to obstacles, to the frustration of my sovereign will.

Pope Benedict XVI in a Vespers homily on July 24, 2009 quoted with approval Teilhard de Chardin (whom one of his predecessors as head of the Holy Office censured) - "At the end we will have a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos itself becomes a living host." Our formal liturgical celebrations are not ends in themselves; rather they commit our vision and our energy and our actions to what God is doing in the universe – making the cosmos itself a living host. Once again, our actions to preserve creation are not merely political, they are liturgical. We are all aware of the introduction of the new edition of the Roman Missal this Advent and probably many of us are not looking forward to it. It's a done deal about which we probably can't do anything. One of the purposes of this new translation is supposedly to restore more solemnity to our common worship. Does it make any sense to bring solemnity to our acts of worship and not bring a sense of liturgical awe to our dealings with the whole world?

## SOCIAL JUSTICE



Those of us who attended the Chapter at Monmouth University might remember the discussion and even the discontent that an option to work against global warming as a Congregation was somehow a distraction from or even a betrayal of the CSJP tradition of concern for and solidarity with the materially poor. Nothing could be further from the truth. The poor are the first to suffer from the consequences of global warming – while you cannot contribute any particular storm to global warming there is no question that the violence and frequency of storms is related to the heating of the atmosphere – a hot atmosphere holds more water and it has to come out somewhere. There are already hundreds of thousands of “climate refugees” in the world, driven from their homelands by the direct effects of climate change.

If global warming is our planet's most pressing issue, large-scale population displacement is the human consequence. Massive continental migration is already under way, and diminished natural resources continue to threaten the lives of millions.

The quickly submerging islands of Tuvalu in the South Pacific, drought-affected regions of

Sudan, storm-susceptible coastlines of Bangladesh, and rapidly expanding deserts in China are forcing millions to relocate beyond their borders. Who will accept these refugees, and how will they impact their adopted homeland?

Filmmaker Michael Nash spent two years traversing the globe, visiting these and other hot spots where rising sea levels are threatening millions of people's survival. Strong visuals and potent testimony from the victims of climate change, politicians, scientists, relief organizations, and authors help sound the alarm for instituting new policies and working together to create solutions to cope with this imminent crisis. The film *Climate Refugees* fervently captures the human fallout of climate change. I invite you all to try to watch it.

Obviously this is a new concern for Catholic Social Teaching. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have addressed ecological concerns frequently. And papal words have been accompanied by papal action. Vatican City claims to be the first carbon neutral state in the world. The Vatican has installed photovoltaic panels on the roof of the Paul VI audience hall. It funds reforestation in Hungary as a carbon offset – no doubt to show the esteem of the Holy See for our Hungarian sister Alexandra Kovats!

While these are surely hopeful signs, none of the Church documents on earth care have an appropriate sense of urgency. There is only one papal statement in the last 30 years that approaches a sense of urgency appropriate to the gravity of climate crisis: Pope John Paul II in an address at a Wednesday audience on January 17, 2001, said:

“It is necessary, therefore, to stimulate and sustain the **ecological conversion**,” which over these last decades has made humanity more sensitive when facing the catastrophe toward which it was moving. Man is no longer “minister” of the Creator. However, as an autonomous despot, he is understanding that he must finally stop before the abyss.”

Catastrophe...autonomous despot...abyss – strong words. But this address is the lowest level of papal discourse. These words have never been quoted in a church document since, even though subsequent documents are liberally sprinkled with quotations from the long pontificate of John Paul II. Not even the *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) quotes these words. Indeed, in that comprehensive work, the two most serious ecological issues of our time, global warming and the destruction of global biodiversity, merit together a single paragraph. Although the Vatican has participated in all the United Nations climate summits and has supported robust reductions in carbon emissions, the church itself does not publicize this fact and few people know it.

Pope Benedict's encyclical on moral life, *Caritas in Veritate* was issued five months before the Copenhagen climate summit and yet the Pope does not address climate change as a moral issue. What a wasted opportunity! Despite our reputation as a pro-life church, we really show no conception in our documents that the flourishing of human life is linked to the flourishing of planetary life.

So in addition to writing to and lobbying our members of Parliament or senators and congress people, we need to write to our diocesan papers, to ask pastors to put things in bulletins. We need to use our influence not just in the world of politics and industry but also within our communities of faith. This is a wonderful aspect of the work that CSJP Suzanne Golas is going in Waterspirit, one of the sponsored ministries of the Congregation. Suzanne not only partners with local ecological groups over the health of coastal waters but also takes the message to parishes and Catholic schools. Waterspirit has even received an award from the Diocese of Trenton!

I invite you now to spend a few moments in silence, to get in touch with what is stirring in your heart and mind and gut from this presentation. Then I will invite you to share in small groups around the following questions:

**Reflection, Integration and Sharing:**

How does our commitment to Care of Creation open up for you the depths of our faith tradition?



**PRESENTATION II:  
To Enhance the Beauty of the Whole:  
The CSJP Tradition.**



“Home” is an important word in the CSJP tradition. One of the earliest CSJP ministries was to provide homes for working girls. Mother Clare had an ambitious plan to establish homes to prepare girls for emigration from Ireland and homes in the United States to be a place of support and integration into a new culture. It’s a model that she was never able to realize in her own time but it is also a model that other groups are using in our own day for immigrants to the United States from Central and South America. The property in Englewood Cliffs was originally a vacation home for Irish working girls, most of them domestic servants, from New York and the cities of New Jersey. They were commonly referred to in the press as “the Bridgets,” reflecting the fact that many of their employers never bothered to learn their real names but simply called them “Bridget.” Many of them were victims of sexual abuse from which they had little recourse. There were articles in magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* about “how to handle your Bridget” and “how to deal with a

disobedient Bridget.” It says something about Mother Clare and her first companions that they wanted to create a Sabbath space for the “Bridgets” where they would be known by name and respected, where they could rest in safety. There would be as many as 200 young women at a time, taken care of by, at the most, six sisters – pumping water up from the Hudson; making meals; setting out lamps!

Ecology is also concerned about home. The very word comes from the Greek word “ΟΙΚΟΣ” meaning household. Behind the image of God the Father in the Rublev icon is a house. Creation is the household of God. Indeed in creating the invisible God becomes our universe home. All beings dwell in God as in our home. In the icon, the perfect circle of Trinitarian intimacy is broken, is open, has an empty place at the table designed for each creature without exception. In a certain sense the icon is saying that the Divine community is waiting to be completed when each creature takes a place at that table of hospitality.

One of the oldest expressions of our charism, found in Constitution 11, is to promote peace in family life. Mother Clare knew that peace is a relational reality; peace comes from the restoration of just relationships – not from giving a distressed individual a tranquilizer. There is no peace for the individual if peace does not reign in relationships. Now we know that the household is no longer just the Irish farmer’s cottage. It is the whole planet. Our family is not just our flesh and blood relations but every being. Our commitment to address global warming is therefore the expression of our charism at its deepest and widest – to promote peace in the

family of kin that is the universe community; to address the injustice that has resulted from thoughtless human actions against the integrity of the Earth family.

Marge Tuite, a Dominican sister and a real mentor and matriarch of the social justice movement in the church in the USA, always used to say “Make the connections! Make the connections among the forms of oppression!” Her ability to do that is precisely what makes Margaret Anna Cusack so extraordinary. There have always been people who relieved the needs of the poor. There were few people in 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholicism who were able to make the connections among the various forces that made people poor – Margaret Anna was one of them.

You may have seen in a recent issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* a letter of IHM Sister and former LCWR President Nancy Sylvester. She was responding to an article that reflected on a possible consequence of the move of the center of the church’s life from Europe and North America to South American and Africa – that there would be more interest in issues of poverty and justice and less interest in internal church reform issues like the ordination of women. Sylvester challenged this point of view and pointed out that it’s the same view of the world that is at the bottom of justice issues whether inside or outside the church – justice is the church is not an optional luxury we will work on when all the hungry are fed – it’s the same mind set that undergirds oppression anywhere – to take it on anywhere is to take it on everywhere. We must make the connections among the forms of oppression.

Therefore our concern for earth is not because it's a trendy issue but because it's the ultimate connector. None of the justice and peace issues that we address make any sense outside of the context of the wider 13.7 billion year story of the unfolding of the cosmos.

Here's an amazing connection I just learned – do you know that without lightning there would be no plants? 80% of our atmosphere is nitrogen and nitrogen is an essential food for plants. 22 million tons of nitrogen float over every square mile of earth – yet in its aerial form nitrogen is insoluble and unable to be absorbed by plants. Lightening heats the air causing a chemical reaction between nitrogen and oxygen that results in nitrous oxide. Nitrous oxide is water soluble and is carried by the rain into the soil where it can be absorbed by plants. That pungent odor that you smell in the air after a thunder storm is nitrous oxide. So the next time you admire a rose thank the bolt of lightning that brought it to you – an amazing connection! It shows us how crucial is the work of making connections. Things that seem as disparate as lightening and roses are in actuality partners with each other in the great dance of life.

Margaret Anna/Mother Clare was a connector. She saw the relationship between systems of thought and patterns of oppression. If she were alive today...and she is, in us...she would be delighted that a previous general chapter called us “as peacemakers...to value Earth as our teacher.” And that our *Seeds of Peace-Growing in Non-violence* challenge us to address “a violence that is truly cosmic.”

Although Mother lived before the development of a modern ecological consciousness, she did have a deep sensitivity to the beauty of Earth and the delicacy of creation. She tells us that as a young woman one of her favorite readings was *The Bridgewater Treatises* that recounted the glory of God in different aspects of the natural world. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the age of Darwin and Anglican theologians were concerned about the growing split between the sciences and theology, a split that has only widened in our day. It's telling that something like 90% of Americans say they believe in God – but only 7% of the members of the American Academy of Sciences report a belief in God. *The Bridgewater Treatises* were works of natural theology that attempted to show the action of God in the diverse branches of science. It was a limited edition of 500 available by subscription – and one of those 500 was young Margaret Anna! She also tells us that she delighted to read works in geology and astronomy. She was deeply moved by the plight of the rural farming population of Ireland. Her experience of famine taught her that thoughtless human intervention into the processes of nature can cause misery for hundreds of thousands of people. Were Mother Clare alive today she would be in the forefront of the ecological movement. There will be no peace for earth's inhabitants if there is no peace for earth itself. Margaret Anna calls us to a relationship of Shalom with earth – to know our place in the wider community of earth and to be responsible members of that community of life.

Listen to how she connects the fate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish peasant with the devastation of Earth, quoted in our Chapter Acts

*“Ireland in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> form a painful contrast, notwithstanding the boasted march of intellect. The ancient forests have been hewn down with little profit to the spoiler and to the injury in many ways of the native. The noble rivers are there still and the mountains look as beautiful in the sunsets of this year of grace as they did so many hundred years before; but the country which was in “God’s keeping” then, has but little improved since it came into the keeping of man; for the poor tenant, who may be here today and tomorrow cast out on the wayside, has but substituted ill-fenced and ill-cultivated fields for wide tracks of heather and moorland, which has at least the recommendation of attractive scenery and of not suggesting painful reflections.”*

*(The History of Ireland, 256)*

Our General Chapter Act, “Seeds of Peace: Care of Creation and Climate Change” affirms that CSJP concern for the results of human intervention into global climate is rooted in our tradition – “In her own time, Margaret Anna Cusack (Mother Clare) made the connection between the devastation of earth and the victims of famine.” What does this 19<sup>th</sup> century woman have to say about a very 21<sup>st</sup> century problem? How can her words and example inspire us to deep contemplation and efficacious action today?

It might seem that a 19<sup>th</sup> woman like Mother Clare, living as she did before the insights of contemporary ecological science, might have little to say to us. However, as ecologist Daniel Swartz notes, “Once upon a time we knew less about the natural world that we do today. Much

less. But we understood that world better, for we lived ever so much closer to its rhythms.” Mother Clare lived in that “once upon a time.” Although her ministry would bring her to industrial centers like New York and Nottingham her roots were in the British and Irish country side. Unlike us she would have known where the water she drank and the food she ate came from. She would have known farmers and their precarious lives personally. In global climate change we see and suffer the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the result of a 200 year dependence on fossil fuels. At the dawn of the industrial age Mother Clare, with prophetic insight, was already observing the shadow side of unlimited economic growth. In her 1881 work *The Present State of Ireland Plainly State: A Plea for My People and My Race*, she warns of the danger of an economy based on unlimited consumption instead of sustainability, “Civilization, such as we understand the term at the present day, requires artificial conveniences, if not conventional luxuries, such as never existed and therefore were never desired, in a primitive state. The earth was tilled then to procure necessary food and cultivated to produce necessary raiment. Nature yields to our demands so far but when we endeavor to press a further return we fail to obtain it...A moderate return of income can be obtained from the land...but where more is demanded, then nature revolts and the usurer suffers.”

### **How does Mother Clare call us to live out the Chapter Act on climate change?**

**1. Make connections** – Mother Clare was a genius at making connections among forms of oppression and the social and religious

structures that supported them. Ecology is all about seeing the connections of interdependence that hold the cosmos together. And so when we head to Wal-Mart in order to save a few pennies, Mother Clare would ask us to make connections – Why the disproportion between the salary of the CEO and the clerk at the check out? Why can't the largest corporation in the world provide adequate health insurance to its employees? What is the environmental impact of huge buildings and mammoth parking lots?

**2. Live closer to the rhythms of nature** – Learn where your food and water come from. Meet local organic farmers and support their efforts. Listen to the revolt of your own human nature and don't press it to work beyond its limits. Mother Clare was not so good at this herself. The sisters in Kenmare sometimes complained that she was grumpy when she spent the night writing and didn't get a good night's sleep! Diarmuid O'Murchu has famously remarked that there are no more active women religious in the United States; they are all hyperactive.

**3. Advocate** – There was not an English speaking newspaper in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even in New Zealand and India, which did not report on the activities of the Nun of Kenmare. As she raised her voice in a plea for her people and her race so must we raise our voices in favor of the victims of climate change – and the first to suffer are poor women and children. So let's bring the issue to the table – in our parishes, with our families and friends, with our governments.

Two consciousness changing/ advocacy tools I would recommend:

a. *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium*

This is a wonderful tool consisting of videos, group exercises and discussions aimed toward bringing together a group of people around three goals: “to bring forth an Environmentally Sustainable, Spiritually Fulfilling, Socially Just Human Presence On This Planet.” I encourage you to bring this symposium to your parishes, faculties, CCD teachers, hospital staffs, etc.

<http://awakeningthedreamer.org/>

b. *Transition Community Movement*

This movement arose in response to the frustration that people feel around the inaction of political and economic institutions to address climate change on the macro level and the sense of powerlessness that results at the individual and local levels. It offers tools and resources for people to act on this urgent situation without waiting for politicians to get on board – to find ways of living at the local level that lessen our dependence on fossil fuels. This is the first of the twelve principles the movement operates out of:

Transition Initiatives are based on a dedication to the creation of tangible, clearly expressed and practical visions of the community in question beyond its present day dependence on fossil fuel. Our primary focus is not campaigning against things, but rather on creating positive, empowering possibilities and opportunities. **The generation of new stories and myths are central to this visioning work.**

Once again the importance that is given to conversion - to a new vision of God, ourselves, and our relation to the natural world.

<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

**4. We might explore the Franciscan roots of our charism.** The saints of Assisi, Francis and Clare gave Mother Mary Francis Clare her name in religion. Even after she left religious life and the Catholic Church she never went back to her baptismal name but was always known as M.F. (Mary Francis) Cusack. Initially wanted the CSJPs to be third order Franciscans which, for a variety of reasons, never eventuated. Francis of Assisi remained dear to her even in her later life when all things Catholic were bitter to her. She writes, "Of all the saintly characters he seems to have been the most attractive because he was the most Christ-like... There is a shrine in my heart, dedicated to the memory of St. Francis of Assisi which will never be vacant, because I love him for his love of my Lord."

The Franciscan tradition, so formative of Mother Clare, offers a rich source for a spirituality of care for creation. Sisters Ilia Delio OSF writes "To be Franciscans in an evolutionary universe is to have awareness that our actions have the power to move the universe toward its fulfillment in Christ or they may thwart this goal. What we do matters to the matter of the universe."

An expert on St. Francis, Franciscan Brother William Short did a doctoral dissertation on stories about animals in the medieval lives of the saints. Usually these stories involved God using animals to do things impossible to animals in order to prove a spiritual point. There are many

stories like the following: A farmer steals a consecrated host and hides it in his bee hive with the hopes that it will cause the bees to produce more honey. When the horrified parish priest discovers this, he splits open the hive to rescue the Blessed Sacrament – only to discover that the bees have formed a monstrosity out of wax around the host and are circling around it as they buzz "Tantum ergo." Francis is the first in Christian history who said that animals praise God by being animals. He preached to the birds that they would sing like birds not so that they would sing Gregorian chant.

The great Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus, with an insight that resonates with the new cosmology, rejected the theology that said the Incarnation was the result of human sin and said rather that the Incarnation was part of God's loving plan from the beginning. Indeed, creation happened in view of Incarnation – all of creation is the God/home in which we dwell.

So what we are really doing is the very traditional CSJP activity of promoting peace in the home. Theologian Sallie McFague draws on that same image and invites us to draw up new rules for our planet home:

"The ecological model of human life is a **functional creation story** – one that has practical implications for how we live at the personal and public levels."

"We could call these implications our new "house rules." House rules are what one pins on the refrigerator as guidelines for sharing the space, the food, the resources of the home."



“The basic rules are:

- ∞ Take only your share.
  
- ∞ Clean up after yourself.
  
- ∞ Keep the house in good repair for future occupants.

The Ecological Reformation is the Great Work before us.”

Sallie McFague

Climate change activist Bill McKibben <http://www.billmckibben.com/> reminds us that faithfulness to our CSJP tradition to direct, hands on service to the poor is not enough. Indeed if we ignore the crisis of climate change, we are betraying the very poor we purport to serve:

“In a certain sense my life work is frustratingly abstract: trying to reach national and international accords that would slow the flow of carbon into the atmosphere. It’s not nearly as satisfying, even for me, as building strong local

economies and farming networks or aiding real people in dire need of real and immediate help. But it is, I fear, crucial work that undergirds those other efforts.

What we are trying to do is somehow keep the basic operation of the planet on course *so that we actually have some hope of getting around to those other tasks*. Nothing that anyone has done this summer to aid the poor can compensate for the damage we’ve done simply by raising the temperature. There is no way to repair and heal while we’re still inflicting damage. Whatever else you are doing, you need to save a little bit of energy for joining the fight for climactic stability.”

I invite you now to a few moments of silence to get in touch with what is moving inside you and then to share in small groups using these questions:

### **Reflection, Integration and Sharing**

1. Tell a story about CSJP homemaking.
  
  2. How can we release the energy of our charism for the integrity of our Earth home and its inhabitants, especially peoples and species most threatened. What are the new CSJP “house rules”?
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## CONCLUSION

Frommer's, the company that has brought us some of the best budget and discount travel advice on the market, has just released a new travel guide that is a must-read. *500 Places to See before They Disappear* is not only a great resource for new trip ideas but it is a stark reminder that a number of our modern wonders – man-made or natural – might not be here forever. Here are some of the wonders that are disappearing:

- ⌘ Jungfrau: The Melting Ice Cap of Europe
- ⌘ Berlin Wall: Germany's Former Dividing Line
- ⌘ Venice: A City Sinks Into the Lagoon
- ⌘ Anne Frank's Chestnut Tree: A Dying Symbol
- ⌘ Leaning Tower of Pisa: A Tuscan Icon

Most moving perhaps from a CSJP perspective is the following:



English Bluebells: A Fading British Icon  
Britain has many icons: double-decker buses, fish and chips, the Union Flag. Few realize, though, that another one of the British emblems

are its many natural wonders – white cliffs, towering mountains, blue lakes. One of England's loveliest outdoor features is under threat: the bluebell. Usually blanketing the countryside in April and May every year like a Beatrix Potter drawing, warmer temperatures earlier in the year means this flower has more difficulty maturing and setting seeds. Despite legal protection of the bluebell, the sweet springtime scents of the wild bluebell are fading.

Bluebell Hill was the name of the section of Nottingham, England where the first Sister of Peace motherhouse was located. It was a providential name. Traditionally in the United Kingdom, bluebells trumpet the arrival of spring. For the English it is hard to think of their countryside without thinking of this beautiful flower growing wild in woodlands, hedgerows, bracken and grasslands. And so Bluebell Hill was the site of the springtime of Mother Clare's dream of a new congregation in the church – the Sisters of Peace.

Yet today the native bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) is threatened in many parts of the country, for all these reasons:

- ⌘ Competition and hybridization with the Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*), a similar non-native species that is frequently grown in gardens.
- ⌘ Habitat loss as a result of conversion of woodlands to agriculture or conifer plantations. Poor land management may also have an adverse effect on habitat.
- ⌘ Unsustainable collection. Since 1998 it has been illegal to collect bluebells for commercial purposes.

☞ Climate change. While some species may prosper from a warmer climate in these shores, the potential fate of the native bluebell remains uncertain.

A part of nature that delighted the eyes of Mother Clare and the first Sisters of Peace is now endangered. A lovely herald of springtime is being silenced. The fate of the bluebells of Nottingham is a story that can be told of thousands of species of plant and animal life, of our earth and water and air, of our home planet itself. We have committed ourselves and our energies and resources to working for a world in which both we and the bluebells can flourish.

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### CLOSING RITUAL

Susan Francois has prepared for us a beautiful reminder of this assembly – a card with a picture of a field of gorse and the words of Mother Clare with which we began our reflections. As you receive the basket of cards, I invite you to hand one to your neighbor using some words of greeting from the Franciscan tradition.

We are all familiar with the Italian expression of greeting and farewell “Ciao.” We are probably less familiar with its origins. It is an elision of the Italian words “vostro schiavo” “I am your slave” – a greeting that reflects feudal Italian society with its distinct class structures and preoccupation with paying homage to superiors. Francis invited his followers of every class of society not to use this greeting but to use another “Pace e bene” – Peace and All Good. This is our closing prayer and our deepest

desire—Shalom and the flourishing of life for one another and all creation.

Terrence J. Moran, CSJP-A

