

A Seamless Garment of Eco-Justice: Green Sisters in Kansas

By

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Abstract

Catholic sisters fuse long-standing, creation-oriented theology, the new story presented by science, and Catholic social justice teachings into a seamless garment of social justice and solid activism. Sisters shaped the landscape of the United States through the creation of a vast network of schools, hospitals, and orphanages. While not as visible as the black-robed nuns of the past, sisters are still at the forefront of social change, standing up for the ‘least of all people,’ and filling the needs of society. As the global ecological crisis worsens, Catholic sisters heed the call to expand social justice to include all of creation. Convents across the country are converting grounds into organic gardens, adopting land ethics, and establishing earth-centered ministries. This thesis will focus particularly on one group of Catholic sisters in small-town Kansas who extend an ethic of non-violence to all of creation and who strive to treat all – including the earth – as “Dear Neighbor.” The development of the ecological awareness of these women emerged as a result of complex social movements, dedicated networks, and faith in an ever-changing church. To present the process clearly, I will provide a brief characterization of women religious in the United States, the development of the environmental movement, the activism of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and finally the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas. Narrative accounts of the journey toward ecological awareness fill out this idealistic framework into a well-rounded, realistic approach to eco-justice in the Heartland.

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My family has a tradition of saying our “thankfuls” every night at dinnertime. It’s a great way to maintain perspective during difficult times and also to celebrate good tidings. As with all major events, it’s easy to finish, celebrate, and move on without adequately thanking those who helped you along the way. So many people have supported and encouraged me throughout my graduate work and I am grateful to each and every one of them.

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Chapter 1: Overview

Popular U.S. culture presents various images of a nun: a severe woman dressed in a long black habit wielding a ruler, or perhaps the cheerful 70's alternative nun sporting a guitar and singing hymns on the street, or still yet an old woman working with the poor. The one thing most people don't envision is a highly educated senior citizen lecturing a thirty-something on the importance of recycling, extolling the virtues of composting, and expounding on the connections between the moral imperative to help the poor and the urgent need to protect our environment. While the image of an "eco-nun" or "green sister" is not mainstream, it is a growing reality that should not be overlooked.

History of the Sisters in the United States

Catholic convents historically offered an alternative for women seeking a life outside of traditional women's roles. In taking vows, sisters or "women religious," as they call themselves, were not only devoting their lives to God; they were also dramatically increasing the educational and vocational opportunities available in a time when women had few options.² Caring for the forgotten of society was long seen as the realm of the sisters. The first community of sisters arrived in the United States in 1727. Sisters in the following years continued to build schools, orphanages, and hospitals according to the need of the times and region. Strong women raised money for projects and staffed institutions; they consistently saw needs and filled them – wherever they were.³

The 1940's and 50's marked the glory days of Catholic religious life in the United States. Women entered convents in droves, Catholic education and healthcare systems grew, and ministries expanded. However, the positive growth contributed to larger systemic problems.

Sisters toiled away in hospitals and taught children for meager wages.⁴ As quickly as the young women joined, they were assigned to overcrowded classrooms or hospitals, often with insufficient education and minimal supports. The stress on the communities and individuals was unsustainable. The Sister Formation Conference, precursor to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, was formed in 1954 to address the increasing problems of over-worked, under-prepared women. Convents, academies, and women's colleges adopted new curricular standards ensuring that sisters received adequate education. This focus on education increased opportunities for full-time, well-rounded study, and expanded vocational options. The Sister Formation Conference created a large group of well-educated, highly organized, dedicated women, networked across the country, who were spring-loaded and ready for the changes of Vatican II.⁵ Yet, the resulting renewals in theology and mission frequently met institutional roadblocks.

Changes in the Air

While the 1950's presented increased education, community renewal and more reasonable expectations of sisters, the 1960's rocked the very foundations of Catholic life in the United States. Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) convened the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962 and Pope Paul VI (1897-1978) concluded the Council on December 8, 1965. John Kennedy was elected as the first Catholic president in the United States; he was assassinated three years later. Women's rights issues reached a frenzied peak. Martin Luther King preached, marched, and was assassinated. The Vietnam War and Civil Rights issues sparked protests for peace. Society was in tumult and change was in the air. The changes sisters

experienced during this time were shaped by the larger societal movements that affected all Americans.

The sweeping changes of the Second Vatican Council both inspired communities and strained relations with the hierarchy as sisters followed their charism – or mission – to follow the spirit of renewal encouraged by Vatican II. No longer were Catholics, particularly vowed religious, to be in opposition to the world but rather they were to live in and among the larger populace.⁶ As Catholics worldwide struggled to find a foothold in the post-Vatican II world, sisters launched into new missions and took on the common – and multiple – causes of the day.

Environmental History

Amid the turmoil of the times, the environmental movement was gaining momentum. The decade following the opening of the Second Vatican Council provides a snapshot of the environmental events of the time. Rachel Carson's enormously influential *Silent Spring* was published the year that Vatican II convened (1962). Congress passed the Clean Air Act (1963) and the Wilderness Act (1964); the first list of endangered species was published (1967); an oil tanker spilled three million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean near southern California (1969); the first Earth Day took place (1970); and DDT was banned (1972).⁷ In 1967, *Science* published a relatively short essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," by Lynn White, Jr., which sparked massive controversy and ultimately led to the development of the field of eco-theology. White, a well-known medieval historian and church-going Protestant, cast blame squarely on the 'Judeo-Christian' tradition for centuries of exploitation justified by a theology of domination. White argued that Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the Western view that nature has no purpose save to "serve man." The historical focus on *domination*, over and

above the Biblical stewardship model, led to widespread destruction and depletion of resources, White argued. The critique did not stop there, however, as White warned that the answers do not lie with science and technology as both are thoroughly marked with a Christian view of the relationship of humans and nature. White asserted that the ecological crisis would continue to worsen until we reject the notion that nature has no reason for existence save to “serve man.” White issued a challenge that a religious response was absolutely necessary to address the mounting problems. While scholars and theologians alike debated the validity of White’s statements, the field of eco-theology slowly emerged as people tried to make sense of White’s critique.⁸

The frightening realities of pollution, global warming, climate change, deforestation, grand-scale species extinction, chemical-induced mutations, and rising sea levels underscore the need to take a good hard look at the human impact on all life systems. Science provides new and clearer insight into the intricate and complex interconnections of the universe. As the environmental crisis worsens, religions must address the resulting social, ethical, and moral implications. The decline of the natural world calls into question not only the health of present generations, but also the welfare of *future* generations and the need to preserve resources for those that follow. Attention to the formation of a Catholic environmental ethic clarifies the ways in which theologians and practitioners reinterpret and re-evaluate existing teachings to fuse environmental issues with overarching Catholic identity.

Development of a Catholic Environmental Ethic

Infusing insights of science with principles of Catholic social justice teachings provides a solid platform for an environmental ethic. Twentieth-century theologians Pierre Teilhard de

Chardin (1891-1955) and Thomas Berry (1914-2009) presented compelling responses, walking the fine line between visionary and heretic. Teilhard worked to bridge the gap between religion and science, cultivating Catholic minds for an understanding of evolution. His work to reconcile evolution with Catholic spirituality forms the foundation of today's Catholic Ecotheology movement. Heavily influenced by Teilhard's thought, Berry claimed that we are socially adrift, left without meaningful stories to guide us. Biblical narratives seem irrelevant and outdated, disconnected from scientific truth and meaningless for many in modern times. The story presented by science, however, also fails to guide and discipline us as it is detached from the mystery and sacrality that move people. Berry's work aims to blend spirituality and science into a narrative celebrating the best of both, providing a guiding story for modern times.⁹

Papal pronouncements increasingly address problems of climate change and environmental degradation. Environmental destruction most directly impacts the poor, precisely those people whom Christians are to protect according to Catholic social teaching. The Vatican has gradually increased its emphasis on the severity of the environmental crisis, categorizing it first as a moral issue, then a social issue, and, ultimately, a life issue. As a result, the emerging Catholic response is primarily that of environmental justice or eco-justice.¹⁰ Macro-level messages from the Vatican and the bishops have emphasized regional and local initiatives as practical solutions, an approach welcomed by Catholic sisters across the country. Convents of socially engaged, highly educated women, devoted to ministry in this world, offer a petri dish for growth of Catholic ecological activism; further, the women's stories present a continuation of the narrative that Berry inspired.

LCWR Resolutions to Action

The complex development of the environmental activism of Catholic Sisters has roots in the formation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). The roots of a network of highly educated women religious adjusting collectively and individually to the changes of Vatican II grew into a strong network of activists tackling social justice issues ranging from human trafficking, domestic violence, child abuse, and elder care to radical peace movements, immigration reform, and environmental justice.¹¹ LCWR's commitment to education keeps sisters up to speed on pressing social justice issues while the leadership model encourages guidance from all levels. The LCWR Global Concerns Committee publishes *Resolutions to Action*, which are succinct, compelling, and highly useful two-page reports that follow a simple format: Experience, Social Analysis, Reflection, and Action. They are informative, dense and, at times, unnervingly pertinent while still being easy to read and difficult to dismiss.

There are many communities of women religious that are recognized for environmental activism, but the actions of smaller, lesser-known communities are equally important. Genesis Farm, a 230-acre organic farm established in 1980 by Sr. Mirriam MacGillis and the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, NJ, focuses on Earth Literacy and Transition culture.¹² The well-known community offers diverse, holistic educational opportunities emphasizing "a way of seeing all people and human cultures, in addition to the lands, waters and creatures of the planet, as an evolving, interconnected web of life."¹³ The Servants, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) community in Monroe, Michigan, received national attention for their painstaking effort to renovate the community Motherhouse in the most sustainable way possible, reusing

materials and ensuring that all new materials were environmentally responsible. The community's website provides the following justification: "Convinced that the plight of the Earth is intimately connected to global poverty, violence and oppression, we commit our personal and communal efforts and resources to building sustainable community."¹⁴ These communities are the kinds featured in mainstream media and are generally those cited in more recent histories of women religious in the United States in the brief mention of ecology. The Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia do not make front-page news but their actions equally impact the earth and its inhabitants.

Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas

The Sisters of St. Joseph were founded in France in 1650 by Father Jean Pierre Medalle, S.J., and six women who sought to live communally in union with God, each other, and their neighbors. A handful of sisters came to the U.S and eventually made their way to Kansas in 1883 under Mother Stanislaus Leary. The sisters staffed schools, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. The community ran a dairy in Abilene to provide for orphans and the grounds of the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia¹⁵ were essentially a self-sufficient village.¹⁶ As times changed, the ministries increasingly addressed social justice and human rights, including providing sanctuary for refugees, advocating against the death penalty, and supporting peace movements. The community is accepting new members both as vowed religious, as *agrégées*¹⁷ (women who join the community with a single vow) and associates¹⁸ (lay men and women who seek to live in the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph). As of June 2013, there were 130 Sisters associated with the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia serving in the United States and Brazil.¹⁹ While the future of women religious is uncertain due to

declining numbers and aging members, the Sisters of St. Joseph focus on the future both in hopes for their small community and for the larger community of earth.

Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project

Members of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas, are extending their charism to care for the other as “dear neighbor” to include the earth. They are breaking new ground in rural Kansas by establishing an organic community garden, educating communities on the need to care for all of creation, and advocating for issues of eco-justice. The environmental awareness of the Sisters of St. Joseph (CSJ’s)²⁰ in Concordia is inextricably linked to the community-wide ethic of non-violence. In the early 1990’s, the community began a process of discernment regarding “how to be with each other” and “how to be with the earth,” resulting in principles that continue to guide the missions today.

During the summer of 2011, The Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project began to document the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia. During two-hour-long guided interviews, sisters expressed their personal histories, steps toward awareness and activism, theological understanding and hopes for the future, all with regard to ecological issues. Environmental activism is a broad term that encompasses efforts towards sustainability, environmental conservation, care for creation, and eco-justice, among many others. Project documentation takes the form of audio-recorded conversational interviews with guiding questions relating to one’s individual experiences and journey of understanding.

The sisters come from diverse backgrounds and life experience. While the majority of the sisters grew up on the farm, many spent much of their adult lives in a variety of urban settings in professions primarily relating to healthcare, education and counseling. Most of the sisters cited their original interest in environmentalism – and spirituality – as coming at a very young age. Most referenced a connection to the divine in nature at various times throughout their lives. Their interest followed the development of a Catholic environmental ethic as cited above, influenced by such figures as Thomas Berry, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Iliia Delio, 13th century mystics, St. Francis of Assisi, and others. Many interviews reflect a deep sense of rootedness in the landscape. Often, sisters expressed extreme frustration with the modern culture of waste, chemicals, and consumerism; however, this frustration was always tempered by the community's ethic of non-violence. Nevertheless, no two interviews are alike as to roots, influences, or outcomes. The individual stories capture the depth and breadth of the ecological awareness and environmental activism present in these women of Kansas.

Further, true to principles of deep ecology and the interconnectedness cited by many in the Green Sisters movement, the individual actions and awareness are just as important as the statements of the Vatican or the Bishops; they are all connected. Sisters were critical to the settlement and acceptance of Catholics in the United States and their stories reflect a strong commitment to the Church and the gospel commitment as they see it. The 'gospel call' is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic, ever-changing demand to respond to the needs as they arise. Personal histories from women who devoted their lives to the Church, heeding the gospel call, represent the growth and development of an ecological understanding rooted in rural America in a qualitatively different way than institutional histories. In many ways these

personal stories color in the outline of the development of a Catholic response to the environmental crisis.

The growth of the Green Sisters movement has complicated connections to larger social movements. The initial chapters of this thesis will provide context and historical background while the latter chapters will delve specifically into the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia.

Chapter 1 will detail the structure of the thesis, introducing the issues and surveying related literature.

Chapter 2 will cover the historical presence of Catholic Sisters in the United States in terms of social justice and mission up until the changes brought about by Vatican II.

Chapter 3 will discuss the social upheaval resulting from Vatican II and various responses of Catholic Communities.

Chapter 4 will very briefly outline the historical environmental movement set among the larger societal unrest of the 1970's.

Chapter 5 will explore the development of Catholic ecological theology, surveying the works of major theologians such as Teilhard and Berry, and presenting statements from the Vatican and United States Council of Catholic Bishops.

Chapter 6 will describe the education and activism of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious as seen in the Resolutions to Action.

Chapter 7 will examine the historical context of the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas, including the community charism – or mission – and its enactment in the world, including the increasing focus on ecology and non-violence.

Chapter 8 will briefly make the case for the value of personal and community histories like the Green Sisters in Kansas Oral History Project and will serve as a transition point from a focus on institutional history to the remaining focus on individual stories.

Chapter 9 will provide a thematic analysis of interviews from the Green Sisters of Rural Kansas Oral History Project, including rootedness in the Kansas landscape, theology, scientific influences, and modern social concerns.

Chapter 10 will discuss criticisms, the status of the sisters, and summarize findings.

Review of the Literature

While Catholic sisters have been studied extensively, the environmental activism of Catholic sisters usually receives only passing mention. Gathering data for the contextualization of this phenomenon was gathered from various sources, including Sarah McFarland Taylor's work on the Green Sisters, histories of Catholic sisters in the U.S., formative writings on eco-theology, church statements, action resources, and environmental writings.

Green Sisters

Sarah McFarland Taylor is essentially the only scholar focusing primarily on the work of the "Green Sisters" in the United States. Using an ethnographic approach, Taylor considers herself an intimate outsider, having spent many hours working on the farms of the communities she studies. Her work focuses on highly visible communities like Genesis Farm and the IHM Sisters in Monroe, Michigan, that receive national attention for their efforts. Her descriptive approach outlines large-scale community activism set among the national Green Sisters movement. The *Green Sisters in Kansas Oral History Project*, which is the basis of this thesis, complements Taylor's work but differs in two major ways: 1) the focus is on one small,

well-established community in rural Kansas and 2) formal oral history interviews capture the individual journeys toward awareness set within the context of the larger community. The narrative accounts of growth, challenges, and successes told in the voices of individual sisters fill out the history of the community actions in a unique way.

Histories of Catholic Sisters

Several oral histories have documented the experiences of Catholic sisters spanning many time periods. Most recently, *Habits of Change* by Carole Garibaldi Rodgers preserved the voices of individual sisters from many different communities across the United States but presented them as independent from the larger work of the communities. Lacking this context, the stories are isolated from the influences and support of the larger community. Other works such as *Sisters* by John Fialka and *Called to Serve* by Margaret McGuinness provide historical context for Catholic women religious in the United States. Specific community works, often written by insiders, provide detailed individual community histories. For instance, *Footprints on the Frontier* by Evangeline Thomas details the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, up until the 1940's.

Action-oriented Resources

A primary source of information on the Green Sisters movement comes from within the network of the women themselves. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious publishes the periodical *Resolutions to Action* that addresses far-reaching social justice issues, ranging from human trafficking to fracking. The intention is to educate sisters, primarily, on the complicated, interconnected issues of social justice. However, even a cursory glance at the *Resolutions* quickly reveals the ecological awareness of the LCWR and its members as an

integral part of larger global concerns. Additionally, the Catholic Climate Covenant, a non-profit organization formed with the support of both the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, provides information on Climate Change from a Catholic perspective, “which emphasizes the pursuit of the common good, promotion of the virtue of prudence and the protection of the poorest of our brothers and sisters already suffering disproportionate impacts from climate change.”²¹ The information on the Coalition’s website (www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org) is updated regularly with current statements from the Vatican and other church leaders, as well as updates on the climate crisis in general. In many ways, it is the primary source of up-to-date information on the Catholic response to the unfolding environmental crisis.

Influences

Modern Catholic eco-theology is heavily influenced by the works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and scientist, and Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest and “geologian.” Teilhard’s writings on evolution, science, and theology cultivated Catholic minds to be more receptive to evolution.²² While Teilhard’s writings form a strong foundation for the Catholic response to the ecological crisis, a conversation about the ecological awareness of Catholic sisters cannot overstate the importance of Thomas Berry’s writings, which guided and informed the movement from the very beginning.²³ Berry’s ‘new story’ explained the scientific view of the history of the universe, connecting evolution with social justice and human actions. The concept that humans are ‘co-creators’ in the evolutionary process connects the impact of human actions with the modern ecological crisis and resulting impacts on the poor and voiceless. The Sisters of St. Joseph (CSJs) in Concordia hosted Berry for a week-long retreat in 1993, which had profound effects on the community, as reflected in the interviews. More

recently, the Franciscan scholar Ilia Delio continues in the scholarly tradition of Teilhard and Berry. Many works focus on these scholars, particularly Teilhard and Berry, but as these are influences and not the primary focus of this thesis a summary of their work will suffice.

Environmental Writings

Lynn White's, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," explained above, marks a tense starting point in the field of eco-theology or eco-spirituality. Sisters cite many environmental writings as influential in their journey toward ecological awareness, however, the most frequently referenced is Rachel Carson's (1907-1964) *Silent Spring*. Principles of bioregionalism, place-based education, and experiential learning also shaped perspectives as the community's *Earth Journal* reflects. The work of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology will help to provide the larger context of the emerging alliance of religion and ecology.²⁴ The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology fosters dialogue between religions and other disciplines (science, economics, education, public policy) seeking comprehensive solutions to environmental problems.²⁵

While there is truth in the assertion that the Judeo-Christian model of nature-domination is in part culpable for the current environmental crisis, religious communities are currently working to assess, reevaluate, and respond to the crisis. The problems of human impacts on the larger world, viewed through the lens of non-violence, call the sisters to extend the notion of "dear neighbor" to include the Earth and all of creation. The individual stories of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, reflect strong understandings of creation-oriented theology, the new story presented by science, and a moral obligation to care for the poor as they combine to create a seamless garment of eco-justice, thus demonstrating that

science and religion together, grounded in social justice, provide an effective vehicle for sustained change.

² Carole Garibaldi Rogers, *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ Margaret M. McGuiness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013)

⁴ McGuiness, *Called to Serve*, 157-8. Citing a study by the NCEA, Margaret McGuiness details the disparity in wages paid to sisters. Between 1940-53, sisters wages increased 25% while the cost of living rose 93%. Sisters teaching in parochial schools received \$511.25 annually with only \$21.75 remaining after deducting living expenses. Further, men religious received 50% less than public school teachers and sisters received only one-half the salary of their male counterparts.

⁵ Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 29.

⁶ Vatican II Council, " *Apostolicam Actuositatem* [Apostolic Activity]:Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," promulgated by Pope Paul VI. (Vatican Archives, November 18, 1965) accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html

⁷ For a more detailed timeline of events affecting the development of a Catholic environmental ethic, see Appendix 1.

⁸ Lynn Jr. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

⁹ Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999)

¹⁰ Warner, Keith Douglass, "The Greening of American Catholicism: Identity, Conversion, and Continuity," *Religion and American Culture* 18 no. 1 (2008): 113-142.

¹¹ See Appendix 2 for a complete list of "Resolutions to Action"

¹² According to the Genesis Farm website Transition Culture is "an international grassroots effort formed out of an urgency to move communities from oil dependency to community resilience in the face of Peak oil, climate change, and economic instability." "Transition Movement: What is the Earth Asking of Us?" Genesis Farm, accessed June 8, 2013. http://www.genesisfarm.org/resources.taf?_function=resource_detail&resource_id=144

¹³ "Genesis Farm Learning Center Programs," Genesis Farm, accessed May 25, 2013. <http://www.genesisfarm.org/program.taf>.

¹⁴ "Motherhouse Renovation," IHM, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Sustainable_Community/Sustainable_Renovation/sustainrenovation.asp

¹⁵ The Nazareth Convent and Academy is the legal title as a civil entity authorized by the State of Kansas on October 21, 1884. The Sisters of St. Joseph indicates the community or congregation of Concordia.

¹⁶ "History," Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS, accessed June 9, 2013.

<http://www.csjkansas.org/about/history/>

¹⁷ "Agrégee Sisters," Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS, accessed June 9, 2013.

<http://www.csjkansas.org/category/agregees/>

¹⁸ "Associates," Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS, accessed June 9, 2013.

<http://www.csjkansas.org/about/associates/>

¹⁹ Marcia Allen, Personal correspondence with author, June 10, 2013.

²⁰ CSJ is the abbreviation for a Sister of St. Joseph.

²¹ "Church Teachings," Catholic Climate Covenant, accessed May 25, 2013.

<http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/catholic-teachings/>.

²² Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Ecological Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 7 no.1 (2007):1-19.

²³Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*. Berry's influence is evident in the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas interviews, as well.

²⁴ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim. "Introduction: the Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology." *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 1-22.

²⁵ Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, accessed May 24, 2013. <http://fore.research.yale.edu/>

Chapter 2: Sisters in the United States

The work of Catholic sisters shaped the landscape of America. They built schools, hospitals, orphanages, colleges, soup kitchens and care homes. In pre-Vatican II times, the sisters toiled away in hospitals and educated children for little or no pay. Sisters paved the way to higher education for women nationwide by building women's colleges, personally pursuing higher education, and earning distinctions in traditionally male-dominated fields. As communities evolve from teachers and nurses to professionals and activists to retirees, the needs of society guide their actions. As women's roles expanded from wife, spinster or sister, to doctor, lawyer or chief executive officer, fewer women chose the sisterhood. However, sisters are still at the forefront of social change, standing up for the 'least of all people,' and filling the needs of society. As the environmental crisis worsens, sisters are educating themselves and the larger community on issues pertaining to sustainability, ecological awareness and care of creation.

The Beginnings

Catholic convents historically offered an alternative for women seeking a life outside of traditional women's roles. In taking vows, sisters, or "women religious" as they call themselves, were not only devoting their lives to God; they were also dramatically increasing the educational and vocational options available in a time when women had few options. Carole Garibaldi Roger's *Habits of Change* reflects this reality:

In an era when a young woman, particularly one from a poor or lower-middle-class family, looked at her choices and saw a life of dedication, education, and professional accomplishment – versus a life, possibly like her mother's, of raising children and struggling to make ends meet – entering a convent became an appealing option. Outside of the convent there were few opportunities for a woman

*to become an executive; a nun with leadership abilities could become a school principal, the president of a college, or the administrator of a hospital.*¹

Upon arrival in the United States in 1727, sisters set about building orphanages and hospitals according to the need of the times and region. Sisters consistently identified the needs of each particular area, raised the funds, and staffed the resulting institutions, and started looking for the next need to fill. John Fialka's *Sisters* explains, "becoming a Catholic sister offered the curious a way out of a stifling, small community and a ticket to see the larger country, especially frontiers and other places where few women, aside from prostitutes, dared to go alone."²

Changing the landscape

The sisters were highly visible representatives of the Catholic community. In many ways, sisters helped the larger population of Catholics assimilate into American society through their steadfast devotion to serving the needs of the people. Strong anti-Catholic rhetoric encouraged widespread discrimination against Catholics. The Civil War brought about a marked shift in the intense discrimination, due in large part to sisters on the front lines caring for casualties on both sides. Sisters walked brazenly on the battlefields retrieving the injured, caring for all, oftentimes at their own expense. They converted convents into hospitals to care for the wounded, representing 20 percent of nurses on both sides³. In the years that followed, sisters continued to care for the sick during epidemics of cholera and typhoid fever. Untold numbers of sisters died tending victims of disease either by contracting the illnesses themselves or from sheer exhaustion. Countless women made their way to uncharted frontier territory, built institutions to fill needs, brought culture, education, and much-needed help. Ultimately, the healthcare system established by the sisters marked the largest and most effective

healthcare system the world has ever seen. In addition to hospitals and orphanages, sisters built an impressive parochial school system spanning the United States.⁴ Sisters established the first schools west of the Mississippi, staffed schools in immigrant ghettos, and taught at black schools, among other things, as needs arose. At the peak in the 1950s, the Catholic parochial school system educated 11 percent of America's youth.⁵

Social and economic concerns drove the agenda of the Catholic church and sisters enacted the agenda on the ground. In "The Greening of American Catholicism," Keith Warner asserts that "The impressive scale of Catholic hospitals, schools, and charitable institutions built in America during the first part of the twentieth century cannot be fully understood apart from the influence of social teaching of that era."⁶ While the common notion may be that men tamed the frontier, the work of the sisters clearly had far-reaching impacts.⁷

Growth, Hardships and Renewal

It was also during this time that the population of vowed women religious reached its pinnacle at nearly 180,000 in the U.S.⁸ While numbers declined steadily in following years, the 50's and 60's saw young women entering in droves. Fialka asserted, "the nun's habit . . . was seen as a kind of badge, a license to do good works, and it was usually respected and welcomed. Ambitious women who had the skills and the stamina to build and run large institutions found the convent to be the first and, for a long time, the only outlet for their talents."⁹ Nuns were seen as set apart, the vision of holiness. The influx of new members provided increased visibility, energy and a seemingly boundless future for the sisters.

The youthful energy would not last. Sisters toiled 80-hour weeks in parochial schools with classroom sizes of sixty or more pupils with no vacations and no holidays. Often working

back-to-back shifts with cursory breaks for prayer and nourishment, they staffed the hospitals of America in the direst of circumstances. Still bound to a modified-cloister model, sisters returned to the convent to pray late into the evening and in the pre-dawn hours while still maintaining the responsibilities of professional life.¹⁰ Sr. Virginia (Ginger) Pearl recalled, “You got up, and you did your prayers, and you went to work and you didn’t have a lot of time to interiorize everything, all that was happening.”¹¹ The living conditions of sisters were difficult and, contrary to popular belief, they were not superwomen; they were exhausted and increasingly dispirited. Taking the parochial school mission as an example, as new women entered they were quickly placed in whatever school needed assistance. Inadequate training and minimal supports quickly became pressing issues, as Judy Stephens remembered:

I entered in 1960, and it’s true, the formation of those days . . . you know, you entered and it was a very strict environment with a year of study and then you received the habit. And then you studied some more and then you were sent from mission to mission. In the beginning, I was sent out to teach without enough education. So you’re full time struggling to learn how to do that.¹²

At that time, Sisters received minimal education and training before heading a class, often in areas far from support systems, left to fend for themselves. It typically took a sister 20 years of Saturdays and summers to complete a college degree.¹³ This paradoxical era for sisters ushered in unexpected changes.

Sister Formation Conference

The school, hospital, and social service missions put a huge strain on religious orders to fill the staffing needs of these massive institutions. Sisters entering the convents were quickly thrust out into ministries, often ones that they were egregiously unprepared to undertake. In the early 1950s, Pope Pius XII took notice of the problems inherent in the system and “felt that

an injustice was being done to the people being served by religious who did not have the necessary credentials for their work.”¹⁴ At the urging of Pope Pius XII, communities focused on improving educational opportunities for young sisters and religious communities began the renewal process to update practices to modern life.

In 1954, the Sister Formation Conference was established to improve educational opportunities for young sisters. New curricular standards and increased opportunities enabled full-time, well-rounded study.¹⁵ Communities sent sisters into various fields for training, from the expected education and nursing to science, liberal arts, music, etc. By the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the resulting renewals in theology and mission frequently met institutional roadblocks. In *Women in the Vanishing Cloister*, Helen Ebaugh explains:

*Lacking, however, were the types of structural changes needed to accompany the shifts that had taken place in ideology and the sense of purpose and meaning for religious orders in the twentieth century. As a result, many nuns were feeling the strain and anomie created by the juxtaposition of new ways of viewing religious life hampered by outdated structures that made it difficult to live out a new mission within a cloistered life-style.*¹⁶

The Sister Formation Conference created a large group of well-educated, highly organized, dedicated women, networked across the country. This highly-educated network of women eagerly awaited the renewal and changes promised by the convening of the Second Vatican Council. Many communities were spring-loaded and ready to launch as Vatican II convened.

¹ Rogers , *Habits of Change*, xiii.

² John J. Fialka, *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 2.

³ Fialka, *Sisters*, 5.

⁴ Fialka, *Sisters*, 1.

⁵ Fialka, *Sisters*, 9.

⁶ Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism," 115.

⁷ Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁸ "Frequently requested church statistics," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, accessed May 24, 2013. <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/requestedchurchstats.html>.

⁹ Fialka, *Sisters*, 2.

¹⁰ Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Virginia (Ginger) Pearl, CSJ, "Green Sister in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy, August 6, 2012.

¹² Judy Stephens, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy, July 8, 2012.

¹³ Rogers, *Habits of Change*, xii.

¹⁴ Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister*, 19.

¹⁵ McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 160.

¹⁶ Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister*, 20.

Chapter 3: Rocking the Foundations

Vatican II

In 1962, a new vision for Catholicism began to take shape through talks at the Second Vatican Council. In many ways, Vatican II turned the church on its head. People frequently cite a very visible change - priests traditionally faced the altar, but Vatican II turned them around to face the people. From philosophical or theological changes to practical and highly visible changes, Vatican II changed everything. Formerly, the church maintained primarily an inward focus while Vatican II encouraged Catholics to engage in the larger world. As Sr. Bernadine related, back then, "Catholics were right and nobody else was. I was actually was brought up that outside church, there's no salvation. At this point in my life, I am very aware that is not true at all but in those days, that's how it was."¹

Sisters were encouraged to continue and expand renewals started in the 1950's. Most visibly, they were told to consider how their garb could be updated to that of modern times. Some communities went all the way in a day and changed to contemporary dress; others adopted a modified habit while still others took much longer to discern the appropriate response. Sisters were always set apart by the traditional habits, many of which had been established several hundred years before and were modeled after widows' garb of the day.² The Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia wore a habit of black wool serge with a tight, form-fitting white cloth framing the face, a full black veil, and a plastic guimpe covering the shoulders and upper body. Many recalled the difficulties of this style of dress in the oppressive heat of Kansas summers. Sisters related stories of heat stroke and sweat gushing from the head when the

face-cloth was pulled back. Still, the habit marked them as separate; after Vatican II they were allowed to dress like laypeople.

The church – and its highly visible sisters – were to work actively with and for the people, in solidarity with the larger world. While the work of sisters helped decrease anti-Catholic discrimination, much discrimination remained. Prior to Vatican II, urban and rural communities of all sizes saw divisions between Catholics and Protestants, intermingling was discouraged and Catholics formed a tight, insular network. Vatican II held that the Church is truly and intimately linked with humanity and history - and should respond as such - which is apparent in historical documents such as this joint publication of the Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious:

It is not enough to take a narrow position based on one issue and neglect the total range of issues affecting human promotion. Religious must maintain a special awareness of the deeper implications of their political activity and leadership in the political arena.”³

The Church would no longer stand in opposition to the rest of the world, rejecting the evils of modern society. In the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the opening sentence in the preface reads, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”⁴

Taking Vatican II to heart: Opening the windows and letting the spirit in

The dramatic changes experienced by women religious, in particular, at this time cannot be overstated. Everything changed. While some women embraced the changes and worked for renewal within their communities, others chose to leave, triggering a mass exodus of sisters in the years following Vatican II.⁵ The reasons for this are many and complex and – ultimately –

very particular to the individual woman. In many ways, Vatican II toppled nuns off the pedestal.

Sr. Bette Moslander recalls,

I think some of the young women realized, in fact, there's a little clause in the Vatican II documents, it says that . . . the laity was to be as holy as religious women. That the laity had the same call to holiness that religious had to religious life. So, if that were the case, then why stay in the convent? See, so that's what I mean by they discovered they didn't have a real vocation. Those who had a real vocation stayed. But in a sense, Vatican II took religious life off of the pedestal and brought it down to the level of the laity in the minds of many.⁶

Before Vatican II, nuns were elevated higher than the laity, held a special status and were considered to embody inherent holiness. After Vatican II, all Catholics “everyone had the potential and the obligation to be holy.”⁷ Nuns lost the apparent authority and many felt they lost respect when they took off their habits –they became “common.” However, others embraced the “new” vision of sisters as “of the people.”

For those who stayed, the call of Vatican II brought sisters into active participation in politics and social justice movements. Rogers explains, “after years in which their time had been spent in either the classroom or the convent, they embarked on new ministries, spoke out publicly on issues they believed in, and stood up for people who needed champions.”⁸ Given a choice for the first time in their adult lives, many chose to embark on new ministries.

Continuing in the tradition established by Pope Pius in 1950, communities expanded educational opportunities and diversified the fields of study approved for sisters. Many left the traditional fields of teaching and nursing to “follow the gospel call” instead of the direction of the superiors.

Conflict: Hierarchy vs. Community

Historically, the hierarchy had reined in apostolic communities to conform to the cloister model. The lives of the sisters were highly controlled. Sisters were assigned duties and posts, often more in keeping with the need of the community than with the strengths and preferences of the person. Sisters had no freedom, no individual belongings; they were bound to the will of the community.⁹ The changes resulting from Vatican II encouraged communities to rethink all aspects of religious life. One of the central documents of Vatican II, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, also known by the Latin *Lumen Gentium*, Light of the Nations, declared that all Christians by virtue of their baptism are called to the fullness of the Christian life.¹⁰ In 1965, Paul VI further elaborated on the new responsibilities of laity and lay apostolate (vowed men and women religious), directly relating the activities of laity in the early church with those of modern times. In the early church, the activities of the laity were “spontaneous and fruitful:”

*Our own times require of the laity no less zeal: in fact, **modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified.** With a constantly increasing population, continual progress in science and technology, and closer interpersonal relationships, the areas for the lay apostolate have been immensely widened particularly in fields that have been for the most part open to the laity alone.¹¹*

In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.¹²

Many communities moved from an institutional, top-down-leadership style to a person-centered, democratic organization. Women religious heeding the call for renewal dropped the habit and took on contemporary dress, or modified habits. After a small group experimented for a year or two, the majority of the CSJs in Concordia switched to wearing “street clothes” in

1967 while others chose to maintain a modified habit. While many sisters enthusiastically engaged in Vatican-mandated renewals the changes were not embraced by all.

While many welcomed the changes of Vatican II, “some bishops saw renewal and read rebellion: they ordered the women to follow the guidance of the hierarchy in any attempts at renewal.”¹³ In 1965, the Los Angeles-based Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IHM) found themselves increasingly in conflict with the bishops. The IHM community fully embraced reform inspired by Vatican II but it was too much and too soon for Cardinal James McIntyre (1886-1979). In a highly contentious conflict, the pope came down on the side of Cardinal McIntyre and against the IHM sisters. As a result, 90% of the nearly 400 IHM sisters dispensed from vows to form a noncanonical community, but the impact did not stop there.¹⁴

Formation of the LCWR

At that time, the Conference of Major Superiors of Women represented all American Sisters. In 1969, the conference voted on whether or not to support the IHM sisters. In an extremely close decision, the resolution to support IHM sisters failed to pass by a single vote. Pro-Hierarchy/pro-community debates intensified. In 1971, the Conference of Major Superiors of Women was reorganized as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in a marked shift to move away from allegiance to the hierarchy and toward a full commitment of ministry with the people and a justice focus – in accordance with Vatican II calls for renewal. However, a small segment stood in opposition and maintained that the allegiance to hierarchy was critical. These conservative communities formed the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis (Association of Perfect Charity) to preserve the alliance of community with hierarchy. This debate over

unwavering allegiance to the hierarchy vs. a full commitment of ministry with the people is a critical piece of history for the sisters in the United States. The LCWR's commitment to a social justice focus is evidenced by the diverse missions of communities in the years since this breach. Further, the Vatican investigation of the LCWR initiated by Pope Benedict in 2012 can be seen as a continuation of this debate.

These things did not take place in a vacuum. The women's rights movement was in full swing. Many sisters chose to support the movement and found themselves working with other lay Catholic women as well as Protestants.¹⁵ Changing roles and new opportunities for women expanded across the United States. Sisters found themselves marching in anti-war protests, facing arrest for marching with Civil Rights protestors and standing in solidarity with the poor of the world. The call of Vatican II to engage with the larger society and modern issues along with the increased focus on justice created a shift from a focus on individual acts of charity toward systemic change, as this 1984 joint statement of the Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious affirms:

Many did not cultivate a Catholic approach to politics. And fell "victims to implicit ideologies, such as the American Dream. "More is better" was often a guiding principle rather than "sparing and sharing" or a "theology of enough." There was little encouragement to be critical, to be counter-cultural in the spirit of the gospel. As a result, religious and laity absorbed ideologies unreflectively, so that their decisions in politics often stemmed from premises inconsonant with the Gospel.¹⁶

Sisters heeding the call to Vatican II engaged fully in society with increased participation in the modern political sphere, including the quest for equal rights for minorities and women and environmental issues.

Incorporation of science

Continuing to expand the church's presence in and interaction with the larger world, Vatican II documents addressed science and evolution and the church's response. Before Vatican II, the official church was resistant to such thinking as evidenced by the treatment of Teilhard's work. However, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World set a new tone for the church's relationship with the modern world: "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for analysis and synthesis."¹⁷ The church has often struggled to accept modern scientific discoveries, including the theory of evolution as seen in the treatment of Teilhard de Chardin whose widely read and highly influential work shaped Christian concepts of the relationship of faith and science. Teilhard's writings quickly found a place on the banned books list; the Vatican prohibited publication of his writings, and forbade the sale of his books in Catholic bookstores. As Sr. Carolyn Teter recalled,

I'm a devotee of Teilhard de Chardin . . . back in the 60's . . . his work was just being published and translated into English . . . I remember one of my professors saying, go to the bookstore, buy the "Phenomenon of Man" before it's put on the Index of Forbidden Books. That was the time when it was still in existence. Vatican II had just begun and they hadn't done away with the index, and so we all ran to the bookstore and got The Phenomenon of Man.¹⁸

In 1961, the Vatican issued a *monitum*, or reprimand, against Teilhard's writings stressing the need to protect the minds of the youth against the dangers in his ideas. In "More Being: The Emergence of Teilhard de Chardin," John Haught explains, "by 1965, however, a mere decade after Teilhard's death, the church had come to adopt some of his startling claims as officially its own."¹⁹

While the dialogue surrounding science and religion had been active within the church for many years, the shift resulting from Vatican II encouraged intellectual engagement with the scientific community. This shift is evident in statements from the Vatican regarding the environmental crisis.²⁰

¹ Bernadine Pacht, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview" with Rachel Myslivy on July 8, 2011.

² McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 166-168.

³ Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, *The Role of U.S. Religious in Human Promotion: A Joint Project of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious*, 1984, 5.

⁴ Vatican II Council, "*Gaudium et Spes* [Joy and Hope]: The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World," promulgated by Pope Paul VI. (Vatican Archives, December 8, 1965) no. 1, accessed May 24, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

⁵ McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 174.

⁶ Bette Moslander, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview" with Rachel Myslivy on July 8, 2011.

⁷ Rogers, *Habits of Change*, xiii.

⁸ Rogers, *Habits of Change*, x.

⁹ Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister*, 24.

¹⁰ Vatican II Council, "*Lumen Gentium* [Light of the Ages]: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," promulgated by Pope Paul VI. (Vatican Archives, November 21, 1964) accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

¹¹ Vatican II Council, "*Apostolicam Actuositatem*," para. 1.

¹² *Ibid*, para. 2.

¹³ Rogers, *Habits of Change*, xv.

¹⁴ McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 170-173 provides an excellent account of the IHM conflict alongside other similar situations of the time.

¹⁵ Rogers, *Habits of Change*, xiv.

¹⁶ Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, *The Role of U.S. Religious in Human Promotion*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Vatican II, "*Gaudium et Spes*," para. 5.

¹⁸ Carolyn Teter, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on July 8, 2011.

¹⁹ John F. Haught, "More Being: The Emergence of Teilhard de Chardin," *Commonweal* (June 2009) 17-19.

²⁰ Warner, *The Greening of American Catholicism*.

Chapter 4: Environmental Activism

What is the ecological crisis?

In his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, Pope John Paul II briefly described the extent of the ecological crisis at that time:

The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related 'greenhouse effect' has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants: all of these are known to harm the atmosphere and environment. The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands.¹

The 1967 essay, "Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" by Lynn White, Jr (1907-1987), marks a turning point in the Christian response. White posits that the highly anthropocentric worldview presented in Christianity "not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends"² This understanding of the man-nature relationship is also deeply rooted in the origins and growth of modern science and technology.

*Their growth cannot be understood historically apart from distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma. The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant. No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. **Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.**³*

With equal force, White levels the burden of blame on Christianity and issues a challenge to Christians to fix the problem:

*Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. **Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.**⁴*

The thought-provoking critique of the Judeo-Christian view of nature by a church-going Protestant prompted a reappraisal of Christian environmental ethics and the traditional view of creation.

Not easily disproved from a theological or historical standpoint, the essay put Christians on the defensive and effectively drew them into the dialogue. In response to Lynn White Jr.'s critique, Christian theologians set out to re-evaluate the Christian relationship to nature. In "Toward an Ecological Hermeneutic: A Review of the Earth Bible Project," Ernst Conradie confirms that much of this work has been "deliberately aimed at defending Christianity against the accusations of Lynn White."⁵

White's article has been reprinted widely, from the *New York Times* to the Boy Scout Handbook, and has had lasting effects on Christian thought, primarily in the emergence of the field of eco-theology, which arguably developed and gained strength as a response to the Lynn White thesis. Perhaps the most lingering effect of White's argument is the realization that humans must examine their attitudes towards nature that are firmly rooted in religious beliefs. Further, as Tucker put it, "it might be said that religious communities need to begin with humility, recognizing that we are late in coming to the problems of the environment and that our responses have not been adequate to the enormous challenges we face."⁶

Development of Ecotheology

From the Creation story in Genesis to the end times of Revelation, the Bible provides a vision for relationship with creation. Lynn White started the debate with blame, putting theologians on the backbeat seeking to disprove his thesis. At the same time, the realities became harder to ignore as the environmental movement gained steam and more sought to

formulate a religious response. Scriptural interpretation often takes new turns as direct response to crisis or conflict. If there is a problem, many look to the Bible and their faith traditions for an appropriate response. In *Ecological Hermeneutics*, Christopher Southgate explains, “biblical texts are not merely read, they move and change lives, they function through worship and preaching and live in the imaginations of those who cannot read”⁷ The changes in religious thought and expression apparent over the last several thousand years are due to this continuous cycle of problem, reinterpretation and reapplication. Interpretation of Biblical texts is essential to maintain their authority, as Michael Fishbane asserts in *Midrash and Literature* that “there is no authoritative teaching which is not also the source of its own renewal, that revealed teachings are a dead letter unless revitalized in the mouth of those who study them.”⁸ The needs of the community drive the interpretive tradition. The ecological crisis of which Lynn White spoke has only worsened with time, thus drawing more into the circle of interpretation seeking solutions. Taylor clarifies, “religion is a realm of constant change and redefinition, whereby transformation, exchange, combination, and reactivity are not anomalous but ongoing and to be expected.”⁹

Further, religion “links humanity to the rhythms of nature through the use of symbols and rituals that help to establish moral relationships and patterns for social exchange,”¹⁰ as Tucker and Grim explain. There are many ways to approach the development of a religious environmental ethic or ecotheology. In “The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology,” Tucker and Grim offer three methodological stages: retrieval, reevaluation and reconstruction. Retrieval involves the investigation of religious teachings regarding human-earth relations. Reevaluation allows these teachings and sources to be evaluated in light of

contemporary circumstances. Reconstruction reflects adaptation to current circumstances.¹¹ Tucker's framework agrees with Keith Warner's stages of "greening" a religious denomination as an exercise in practical theology. Initially, environmental problems are defined as outside the field of moral concern. As awareness increases, reflection and re-examination of theological sources in relation to nature and the environment lead to a determination and application of these sources to contemporary problems. In the next stage, leaders offer tradition-specific resources to guide a response, fusing environmental responsibilities with the group identity resulting in action, as Warner elaborates:

*Members of a faith community weave together new, extrinsic cultural values about environmental issues with existing traditions and norms specific to that group. Practical theologies emerge in dialogue between the tradition of a specific religious group, its values and the broader cultural context.*¹²

To be effective – and to follow the letter of Vatican II – the reevaluation and reinterpretation of the Catholic response must be seen in connection with the larger societal issues. Tucker and Grim remind us, "just as religious values needed to be identified, so, too, the values embedded in science, education, economics, and public policy also need to be more carefully understood."¹³ When the environmental crisis is seen as a social justice issue it takes on an imperative tone. Environmental justice, or eco-justice, is a subset of the larger movement that focuses on the disproportionate effects of environmental degradation felt by people of color, minorities, and disenfranchised populations.

¹ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation," World Day of Peace Message, (Vatican Archives, January 1, 1990) no. 6, accessed June 8, 2013.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html

² Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no.3767 (March 1967): 1205.

³ Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis, 1207.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ernst Conradie, "Toward an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project," *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 126.

⁶ Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Globalization and the Environment," *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought* (2005): 95.

⁷ Christopher Southgate, "Introduction to Part III," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical History and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 245.

⁸ Michael Fishbane, "Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel." In *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G.H. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 28.

⁹ Sarah McFarland Taylor, "What if Religions had Ecologies? The Case for Reinhabiting Religious Studies," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* (2007):134.

¹⁰ Tucker and Grim, "The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," 15.

¹¹ Tucker and Grim, "The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," 16-17.

¹² Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism," 113.

¹³ Tucker and Grim "The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," 19.

Chapter 5: Catholic Theological Response

Catholic social teaching provides a vantage point for assessing crises and encouraging action. From poverty and discrimination to economic policy and immigration reform the traditional focus on the common good with a preferential option for the poor provides the basis for a long history of activism that extends to present day. Beginning in 1971 with Pope Paul VI and continuing on to the current Pope Francis, Catholic teaching urges that the environmental crisis has worsened from original categorization as a moral issue, to that of a social issue, and, ultimately, a life issue.¹ As expressed in papal pronouncements, environmental destruction most directly impacts the poor and voiceless of developing nations, urban slums and desolate rural areas, precisely those people whom Christians are to protect.

As a result, the emerging Catholic response, set upon the foundation of catholic social teachings on justice and the economy, focuses primarily on environmental justice or eco-justice. Awareness of and attention to the implications of a global society with complex interconnections prompts a focus on justice in economics and politics which leads easily to ecology and the planetary common good.² In Vatican II documents, Paul VI urged, “Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world . . . every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the human family.”³

The Vatican

Papal statements on the environment and stewardship track very closely with international discourse about economic development; as Warner explains:

Catholic social teaching has been most effective as practical theology when its values are articulated with concrete institutional initiatives expressing those values . . . Recent

Catholic environmental initiatives emerge against the backdrop of efforts to engage Catholic laity about economic justice and papal teaching about stewardship.⁴

Pope Paul VI

Paul VI promulgated several Vatican II documents that placed the church in relationship with the modern world, which set the stage for all following environmental messages. Paul VI was the first pope to use the term "environment" to describe natural resource problems in terms of duty. In the 1971 apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, he described environmental care as a form of solidarity with future generations. This was the first time that future generations were proposed as having moral standing in Catholic environmental teachings.

Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace - pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity - but the human framework is no longer under man's control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family.⁵

John Paul II

John Paul II (1920-2005) made great theological strides towards increased environmental awareness via his expanded notion of the common good, solidarity and interdependence, legitimating the concern for the environment worldwide. In his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, John Paul II explained the ecological crisis categorically as a moral issue.⁶ Warner explains that John Paul "charged Catholics with environmental duties and launched a flurry of Catholic social teaching along these themes."⁷ It is worth noting that John Paul's focus on solidarity lends itself easily to the notion of the planetary common good. In a 1987 encyclical on the Social Concerns of the Church, he juxtaposed solidarity as a moral virtue in opposition to extreme individualism based on self-interest, explaining that Christians should

commit themselves to enhancing the good of the whole through realization of global interdependence:

*(Solidarity) is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say the good of all and each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.*⁸

The growing awareness of the interdependence of the earth's ecology prompts an expansion of solidarity with people on a global scale but also a solidarity with nature, the earth, and the whole cosmos. In "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics," Daniel Sheid summarizes, "solidarity with the Earth is the virtue that converts our distress into concrete moral action for the planetary good"⁹

Pope Benedict XVI

In the 2010 World Day of Peace message, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation," Pope Benedict XVI addressed the increasing ecological problems, asking:

*Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of "environmental refugees", people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources? All these are issues with a profound impact on the exercise of human rights, such as the right to life, food, health and development.*¹⁰

Benedict XVI (1927-) was often referred to as the Greenest Pope for his commitment to establish the Vatican as a carbon neutral state, installation of solar panels in the Vatican and his continued emphasis on ecological solidarity. Benedict took the ecological crisis to a new categorical level: it is a "life issue." Blending economic realities with ecological evidence,

Benedict criticized the expanding gaps between super-development and near-subsistence globally. In his 2007 seminar on Climate Change, Benedict encouraged all to adopt “a way of living, models of production and consumption marked by respect for creation and the sustainable development of peoples.”¹¹ In the 2009 encyclical, *Caritas en Veritate*, he called on international leaders to protect the environment “in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet”¹² and consistently urged life-style changes to ensure the welfare of future generations.

*It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-style and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view.*¹³

Pope Francis

In a startling turn of events, Pope Benedict stepped down from the highest seat of power in the Catholic Church to make way for a new leader. On March 13, 2013, after relatively brief deliberation, the conclave selected Jorge Mario Bergoglio (1936-), a Jesuit and Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who chose the name Francis in honor of Francis of Assisi. If Benedict was the greenest pope yet, Pope Francis is breaking the mold. Shunning the rich finery of the Vatican, Pope Francis’s emphasis on the poor is rattling cages throughout the Catholic world. Taking the reins during the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, Pope Francis is radically redefining the hierarchy. His focus on the environment is impossible to ignore and his statements suggest a strong commitment to environmental justice. One of the first statements he made as Pope reflects this commitment, explaining his thoughts immediately after the final decision, he recalled:

And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted,

*till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we? He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man . . . How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!*¹⁴

In the three short months between his election and the time of this writing, Pope Francis has made so many statements linking the environmental crisis to the Catholic faith that only a brief sampling can be included here. But, suffice it to say, he has brought up the environment publicly with more frequency than any of his predecessors, using strong terms, and maintaining a consistent message. His 2013 Palm Sunday homily encourages:

*Let us look around: how many wounds are inflicted upon humanity by evil! Wars, violence, economic conflicts that hit the weakest, greed for money that you can't take with you and have to leave. When we were small, our grandmother used to say: a shroud has no pocket. Love of power, corruption, divisions, crimes against human life and against creation! And – as each one of us knows and is aware – our personal sins: our failures in love and respect towards God, towards our neighbor and towards the whole of creation.*¹⁵

He simplified the message further in a discussion with the President of Ecuador:

*People occasionally forgive, but nature never does. If we don't take care of the environment, there's no way of getting around it.*¹⁶

Francis' emphasis on ecology shows no signs of stopping as he continues to clearly state the case against consumerism and a culture of waste, emphasizing the need for a just economy, as seen in the most powerful statement to-date in his World Environment Day address:

*A person dying is not news, but if the stock markets drop ten points it is a tragedy! Thus people are disposed of, as if they were trash. This "culture of waste" tends to become the common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person is no longer perceived as a primary value to be respected and protected, especially if poor or disabled, if not yet useful - such as the unborn child - or no longer needed - such as the elderly. This culture of waste has made us insensitive even to the waste and disposal of food, which is even more despicable when all over the world. . . . We should all remember, however, that throwing food away is like stealing from the tables of the poor, the hungry!*¹⁷

Vatican Statements provided justification and encouragement for justice-oriented creation care. The lofty ideals were to be put into place on the regional and local level. Bishops further encouraged and developed an American response to the environmental crises.

Statements from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

In the 1992 pastoral statement, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops addressed the ecological crisis in relation to the universal common good via the phrase “planetary common good.” *Renewing the Earth* states that “the notion of a planetary common good had practical implications for priorities for the U.S. church’s advocacy on environmental issues, placing special emphasis on issues of the commons such as water, air, and marine fishery resources.”¹⁸ The statement took a global view, incorporating language reminiscent of the 1980’s economic justice and peace initiatives as well as the emerging environmental justice movement. Warner explains, “the letter drew from recent biblical studies emphasizing justice but borrowed language from the emerging American environmental justice movement of this period, with its roots in the civil rights movement and African-American Protestant churches.”¹⁹

The pastoral statement urges that the scope of the crisis is global: “In this shrinking world, everyone is affected and everyone is responsible, although those most responsible are often the least affected.”²⁰ Solidarity between developing and developed nations would encourage equitable and sustainable development that would enable poor nations to curb environmental degradation and avoid the destructive effects resulting from irresponsible use of natural resources. Taylor summarizes, “the document embraces ethics based on a notion of a sacramental universe, respect for life, the collective planetary good, a valuing and recognition

of the web of life, and a commitment to solidarity with the poor through, among other things, reduced consumption and voluntary simplicity.”²¹

Eco-Theology and the Infusion of Science

The stewardship model and positive view of nature have always been part of the Christian doctrine. A complete history of creation-oriented theology is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a brief summary of the origins of recent creation-oriented theology must start with Francis of Assisi. In White’s harsh critique, the only saving grace for Christianity was St. Francis.²² Francis’ *Canticle to the Sun* is a song of praise for God, giving thanks for all of creation. Francis often spoke of animals as brothers and sisters. A rich man, he rejected a life of comfort in favor of poverty in monastic life. He lived as a hermit, primarily, amid untamed nature and saw God in all things.²³ At the 1979 World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul declared St. Francis the Patron Saint of those who promote ecology: “The poor man of Assisi gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which is inseparable from peace among all peoples.”²⁴

Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry ushered in a new era of creation-oriented theology in the twentieth century. Teilhard’s evolutionary theology fundamentally shifted the place of humans in the universe. Teilhard wrote,

*For our age to have become conscious of evolution means something very different from and much more than having discovered one further fact We have become alive to a new dimension. The idea of evolution is not, as sometimes said, a mere hypothesis, but a condition of all experience.*²⁵

Teilhard embraced the evolutionary view of the cosmos and worked to bridge the gap between science and religion, but maintained the anthropocentric worldview and the idealistic hope that science would provide useful solutions. His *Divine Milieu* transformed views of Christ to include

not only the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the personal center for the material world, but most importantly, the physical center of the universe. Teilhard articulated this expanded view as the Cosmic Christ or God as all-in-all which he connected with Colossians 1:17, “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Teilhard’s writings originally met with disapproval by Vatican officials but gradually the church embraced his ideas and some claim that his influence is clear in Vatican II documents, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁶ Still, his thoughts remain visionary. As Haught points out, “Nearly half a century after Vatican II, we have yet to catch up with his revolutionary, nuanced, and deeply Christian synthesis of science and faith.”²⁷ Teilhard’s thought inspired many to explore the relationship between religion and science.

Berry (1914-2009) picked up where Teilhard left off, embracing many of his ideas while continuing to expand the understanding of the human place in the universe. While Teilhard maintained western, anthropocentric views and was highly optimistic about the progress of science and technology, Berry articulated the devastating impacts of unchecked human “progress.” Berry urged that while scientific discoveries have expanded our understandings, they have also alienated people and, essentially, stripped the world of all numinous qualities. Taylor explains that western science’s evolutionary narrative, “when told in a context detached from spirituality, fails to capture the intrinsic mystery and sacredness of the cosmic evolutionary process.”²⁸ The ancient stories which used to provide guidance now seem irrelevant and outdated, yet Berry saw how the story of science could enhance Biblical narratives:

We have moved from a sense of time in which the universe revolves simply in ever-renewing seasonal cycles into a universe that has emerged into being through a

sequence of irreversible transformations even while it is also revolving in an ever-renewing sequence of seasonal changes. Our greatest single need is to accept this story of the universe as we now know this as our sacred story. It could be considered as the most magnificent of all creation stories.

This story does not diminish, it rather enhances the earlier story that we have through the Book of Genesis. That story was related to the ancient Mesopotamian stories of the universe. Our new story is attained in a more empirical manner and with new instruments of observation. . . . Only through this story are we able in any integral manner to overcome our alienation from the natural world about us. We are finally able to understand just why our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of the planet on which we live.²⁹

Berry sought to provide a new story for modern times, including scientific insights with cultural histories and religious narratives. In her “Biography of Thomas Berry,” Mary Evelyn Tucker clarifies:

We are confronted with dysfunctionism in both religious communities and in secular societies. Berry proposes a new story of how things came to be, where we are now, and how the human future can be given some meaningful direction. In losing our direction we have lost our values and orientation for human action. This is what the New Story can provide.³⁰

In accordance with the Vatican’s assertion that the economy and the ecological crisis are closely related, Berry realized that appreciation of nature was not enough and realized the interconnection of economics, politics, education and religion. In “Religious Environmentalism,” Christopher Chappel explains, “an economic model that values eco-systems can only arise from a public educated about the natural world, attuned spiritually through religious sensibilities and sensitivities and willing to support protective legislation.”³¹ Berry’s work moved beyond Christian theology, drawing on indigenous spirituality and including non-western understandings, as well. Further, his focus on women’s wisdom empowered the sisters to update and renew worship, liturgies and practices to reflect ecological realities as well as the voice of the feminine. Berry’s writings found wide appeal in both secular and religious

circles – and were studied thoroughly by many Catholic sisters, including the Sisters of St. Joseph who cite Berry as extremely influential in personal and community development of environmental awareness.

Iliia Delio, a Franciscan sister, scientist and theologian, continues to reframe the relationship between science and religion. “The whole cosmos, from the big bang on, is that Word of God being spoken in the vast spaces of the universe.”³² Delio explains the radical changes in understanding of the universe from the first century to now. Science expanded our awareness of the cosmos and revealed that the universe is dynamic, constantly changing, evolving and expanding ever-outward. The truths of science should not be seen as in conflict with religious truths, but rather should encourage the re-evaluation of our understanding of God. Delio situates the modern concept of God and Christ within the second-century view of the earth as static and fixed. Understanding now that the cosmos is dynamic encourages a rethinking of historical conceptions of God. She presents a “Cosmic Christ” in terms of the Big Bang – the first Big Bang brought forth the cosmos as we know it; the second was Christ’s presence on earth which ushered in a new age of thinking and reacting with the earth – one of love. As Sr. Janet Lander clarified:

What’s being developed now out of the new cosmology . . . we’re told science about origins in one hand and the eco-crisis of the planet in the other hand . . . Well, then what is the purpose of this human being that has its roots in and is really - not above - but dependent on this creation? So what is our purpose? Ecotheologians would say that really who we are in this creation is Creation come to Consciousness and as such, we have a moral responsibility to use that consciousness for sustaining the work of God in creation and not its destruction through use and abuse.³³

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- ¹ Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism."
- ² "Renewing the Earth: A Pastoral Statement." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (1991) III.A.C, accessed May 24, 2013. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>.
- ³ Vatican II Council, "*Gaudium et Spes*," no. 26.
- ⁴ Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism," 115.
- ⁵ Paul VI, "*Octogesima Adveniens* [Eightieth Anniversary]: Apostolic Letter," (*Vatican archives, May 14, 1971*) para 21, accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens_en.html
- ⁶ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation."
- ⁷ Warner "The Greening of American Catholicism," 114.
- ⁸ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: [Social Concerns of the Church] Encyclical, (Vatican, December 30, 1987) para 37, accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html.
- ⁹ Daniel Scheid, "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics: Ecological Solidarity and Earth Rights," in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation*, ed. Laurie M. Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell, (Maryknoll, NY:Orbis Books, 2011), 200.
- ¹⁰ Benedict XVI, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation," World Day of Peace Message (Vatican archives, January 1 2010), para 4, accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html
- ¹¹ Talif Deen, "Pontifical Council on Climate Change and Development." Vatican, April 26-27, 2007.
- ¹² Benedict XVI, "*Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth]: Encyclical," (Vatican, June 29, 2009), para 50, accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.
- ¹³ Benedict XVI, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation," para 11.
- ¹⁴ Francis, "Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis," (Vatican, 2011), accessed May 24, 2013. www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media_en.html
- ¹⁵ Francis, "Celebration of Palm Sunday, Homily of Pope Francis, Saint Peter's Square, XXVIII World Youth Day," (Vatican, March 24, 2013), para 2, accessed May 25, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130324_palme_en.html
- ¹⁶ Rome Reports, "Pope Francis Meets with the President of Ecuador and shows his environmentally friendly side," (Rome Reports, April 22, 2013), accessed May 24, 2013. <http://www.romereports.com/palio/pope-francis-meets-with-president-of-ecuador-and-shows-his-environmentally-friendly-side-english-9825.html#Ua1GLpzkoer>
- ¹⁷ Francis, "World Environment Day Address," Vatican Radio, accessed June 9, 2013. http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/06/05/pope_at_audience:_counter_a_culture_of_waste_with_solidarity/en1-698604
- ¹⁸ Drew Christiansen, "Church Teaching, Public Advocacy and Environmental Action." *Zygon* 46, no 4 (December 2011): 982.
- ¹⁹ Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism," 114.
- ²⁰ "Renewing the Earth: A Pastoral Statement," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- ²¹ Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 45.
- ²² Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis, 1206.
- ²³ Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- ²⁴ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation"
- ²⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 193.
- ²⁶ Haught, "More Being," 17.
- ²⁷ Haught, "More Being," 18.
- ²⁸ Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 6.
- ²⁹ Thomas Berry, "The University: Its Response To The Ecological Crisis," Harvard Divinity School and the University Committee on the Environment, April 11, 1996.
- ³⁰ Tucker, "Biography of Thomas Berry."

³¹ Chapple. "Religious Environmentalism," 337.

³² U.S. Catholic, "Universal Savior: Ilia Delio Reimagines Christ" (March 2011)

³³ Janet Lander, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on July 8, 2011.

Chapter 6: The Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Growth of Ecological Activism

“Carriers of the Story,” a 2002 study of ministries in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, reflected an increased concern with ecological issues and an expectation that ecology missions would increase in the coming years. In the “Predicted Deployment of Sisters by Ministry Program Areas by 2004,” areas of ministry were ranked according to the degree they would “decrease, remain the same, or increase.” The study reported that a full 93% of respondents anticipated that the program area of *ecology* would remain the same or increase dramatically. 48% felt it would remain the same while 45% expected an increase. Comparatively, the program most expected to “remain the same” was *healthcare for the poor* (66%). Ministries relating to *Ecology* were expected to increase the most (45%) while the second highest anticipated increase programmatically was *peace* at 37%.¹

Roots in Vatican II Social Justice

Recalling the earlier section explaining the focus on education of the Sister Formation Conference and resulting renewals, it is easy to see how networks of sisters grew in strength and number over the years as sisters gained more advanced education in increasingly diverse areas. Due to the nature of the habitation, communal life requires people to work out ways to communicate, work together, and facilitate dialogue to overcome differences. The same tactics were employed as the LCWR grew. Taylor elaborates, “the creation of intercommunity initiatives and cooperation within LCWR strengthened bonds and communication among communities, redressing the relative isolation that the women had previously experienced . . . Themes such as revitalization of religious life enabled women to engage in collective

examination of and reflection about their ways of living and knowing.”² This collective sharing of information and ideas led to internal community discussion and cycled back to the large scale organization in a continuous loop. Particular issues or problems, such as human trafficking or the privatization of water, were therefore examined on a macro and micro level with each supporting the other with materials, organization and energy. As the changes and renewal prompted by Vatican II took shape in women’s communities, many found themselves engaged in larger societal movements, as suggested above. This work empowered women to seek out channels for dialogue and change while questioning dominant social structures.

Reinhabiting and rhizomic change

Bioregionalist environmental philosophers use the term “Reinhabit” to explain the process of learning how to “live in place.” Bioregionalists bloom where they’re planted, to paraphrase a popular Catholic children’s song. They work to remedy the damage done to the current location instead of abandoning it for greener pastures. In *Green Sisters*, Sarah McFarland Taylor illustrates that reinhabiting has a dual meaning for Green Sisters: they must reinhabit the earth and work to make it ecologically sound, repair damage caused and determine ways to live well into the future while also reinhabiting Catholic religious life.³ Most of the sisters today either lived through the Vatican II changes or came aboard amidst the turmoil of the changes. The women left standing after the mass exodus from the convents are rock-solid, steadfast women, confident in their mission and understanding of the gospel call.

Rhizomic change relates to a model of social activism that embraces side-to-side leadership and a lateral structure, thus allowing opportunities for many to lead from different places. Taylor portrays the decentralized quality of the sisters’ work as similar to a rhizome:

“the rhizome is strong and tenacious, its strength does not emanate from a central source; instead it comes both from its organic decentralization and lateral structure, which provide it with flexibility, and from its ability to adapt quickly to new conditions.”⁴ This metaphor for the work of the Green Sisters is in direct contrast to the “taproot” or top-down leadership of the hierarchical church. In addition, rhizomes are tenacious. A gardener can wipe out every visible trace of the iris, but they continue to grow and resurface. Rhizomic roots can be decimated, leaving only a small remainder, yet they will continue to grow.

Resolutions to Action

The focus on justice, among all of the changes of Vatican II, required stronger and more integrated educational opportunities, as the “Role of U.S. Religious in Human Promotion: A Joint Project of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious illustrates:

Insofar as the spirit of Vatican II has taken hold, there is a rethinking of this integrated approach to the needs of the times. Still, the spiritual formation of religious leaves much to be desired by way of preparing them for carrying out the mandates of Vatican II in daily life and in the market place. Many still lack a global vision of the issues of poverty, the arms race, ecology, forms of oppression.”⁵

The LCWR Global Concerns Committee publishes periodic statements on contemporary justice issues. *Resolutions to Action* cover broad and far-ranging topics such as immigration, human trafficking, the occupy movement, hydraulic fracturing, climate change and the death penalty, to name just a few. The scope of the Justice issues taken on by the LCWR is expansive and simply beyond the scope of this thesis. LCWR *Resolutions to Action* educate sisters on pressing topics – often far ahead of the general population – ranging from human trafficking, immigration, and water quality to poverty. However, it should be noted that when LCWR gets

behind an issue, the nation takes notice, as seen recently in the great progress towards awareness of human trafficking.

Several *Resolutions to Action* specifically address environmental issues while these issues play a minor part in many more. Resolutions to Action are succinct, compelling and highly useful two-page reports that follow a simple format:

Experience, Social Analysis, Reflection, and Action.

Table 1 Resolutions to Action Relating to Ecology	
Earth Charter	2004
Reverencing the Earth	2004
Privatization of Water	2005
Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk	2007
Clean Energy: A Tricky Business with Possibilities	2008
Climate Change and Hunger	2009
Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time	2009
Earth's Call: Reduce our Footprint	2009
Reducing and Offsetting Our Carbon Footprint	2010
The Costs of Hydrofracking	2012
The Right to Water	2013

Format and Function

Resolutions follow a simple and effective format. *Experience* offers a background and brief summary. Often this section includes a personal story or relates how the issue came to attention. *Social Analysis* brings a broader perspective citing social justice issues and using moral, ethical and theological language. *Reflection* marks discernment and the author's perspective. *Action* offers multiple possibilities from global, institutional, and local activism, to contemplative, individual prayer. The *Action* section truly offers something for everyone and, essentially, no excuse to remain inert on an issue. Often the *Resolutions* end with suggested readings. The format of *Resolutions to Action* is effective in that they address issues from a variety of perspectives, all of which lead to action. The function is to inform, present a compelling moral and ethical case, offer reflection and set a course of action.

Topical Areas

Due to the interconnectedness of social issues, environmental factors are addressed in many of the *Resolutions*. For the sake of clarity, only the *Resolutions* focusing specifically on environmental issues will be discussed here. Some are very broad (Reverencing the Earth), some complex enough to warrant multiple Resolutions with further details (Climate Change and Reducing Carbon Footprint), while some offer a critique of American lifestyles (Choosing Simplicity). Select Resolutions will be analyzed topically, focusing on Earth, Climate Change, Water and Simplicity. See *Appendix 2 for a complete list of Resolutions*.

Earth

Reverencing the Earth asks “Does our participation reverence the earth or is it characterized by an addictive over-consumption, which depletes Earth’s non-renewable resources?”⁶ Statistics⁷ illustrate the problem: In 2004, the United States, home to only 5% of the world’s population, used 25% of the world’s oil and 40% of the gasoline. The author explains that oil and gasoline are non-renewable energy sources often mined in foreign countries and imported. Electric usage (22,000 lbs of carbon dioxide per home annually in 2004) contributes to the fact that the earth has 30% more CO₂ in the atmosphere than it did 100 years ago. CO₂ is the primary global warming gas. These facts set the stage for *Social Analysis*. Over-consumption of resources by the minority results in extreme poverty of the majority of the earths’ people and presents an unsustainable future for all. Choosing clean energy and embracing energy efficiency provides a solution. A very brief explanation about hybrid vehicles utilizing statistics on the usage of the Toyota Prius provides a concrete solution. Transportation and electricity collectively yield the largest air pollution. Again, using simple statistics, the author drives home the point: 13% of electricity can be saved by replacing a

standard light bulb with a compact florescent lightbulb (CFL) and switching to a CFL can reduce CO2 emissions by 1300 lbs over the lifetime of the bulb; energy efficient refrigeration saves 11,000 lbs of CO2 over the lifespan of the appliance.⁸ *Reflection* reminds the reader that “Our Christian tradition reminds us that we are not simply for ourselves but that we are part of one body.”⁹ Focusing on future generations should encourage both spiritual reflection and practical adjustments. Action steps include buying low-emission/high fuel economy cars, signing the Clean Car Pledge, buying hybrids, replacing new appliances with energy-efficient models and switching from incandescent lightbulbs to CFLs. The actions available range from free and fast (sign a pledge), to inexpensive and easy (use CFLs), to big and expensive (purchase hybrid cars and Energy Star appliances).

Climate Change

Two resolutions focus on “Climate Change: Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk”¹⁰ authored by Dan Misleh of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and “Climate Change and Hunger”¹¹ by Sr. Roxanne Schares, SSND. *Experience* uses extreme weather events such as recent droughts and Hurricane Katrina as evidence of climate change and resulting problems. Both *Resolutions* discuss the science of climate change using the following logic: warming is unequivocal; the increased temperatures are the result of human activities. Continuing on our present path will further warm the climate in ways more extreme than anyone has previously documented. These events will impact natural systems, such as disruptions in migration patterns, and human living conditions, such as heat-related mortality and spread of infectious diseases. Sea level rises will cause erosion and spur waves of emigration from affected areas. Approximately 20 to 30% of plant and animal species will be at risk of extinction. Solutions

include reducing greenhouse emissions in the following ways: use of renewable energy, increasing fuel efficiency, developing carbon capture and storage systems, increasing home and energy efficiency, instituting changes in lifestyle to decrease carbon outputs, and investing in sustainable infrastructure in developing countries. Dan Misleh states, “Unfortunately, those who have contributed the least to climate change (people who are poor) are suffering the harshest consequences of climate change.” Action Items include “rooting ourselves firmly in our faith community” to “give us the courage and strength to address the task before us and to renew the face of the earth.”¹² Become carbon neutral, support businesses that share your values, contact your legislators, work with local utilities, join with other Catholics to curb climate change.

Climate Change and Hunger

Climate Change and Hunger begins, “For I was hungry . . .” and offers several examples of extreme poverty. Climate change is cited as a primary reason for the global hunger problem. High fuel prices, commercial farming practices, biofuels, increasing demands for energy along with higher animal protein consumption, agricultural policies and speculations in the commodity markets, and the effects of climate change cause food prices to soar and shortages to worsen. Sr. Roxanne Schares adds that temperature increases and erratic weather patterns, including severe droughts, floods, and hurricanes will dramatically impact the one billion extremely poor who live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and other climate-sensitive industries for their livelihoods. Food security may be one of the greatest challenges resulting from climate change. In *Reflection*, she again invokes Matthew 25:31-46 as a reminder of our response to the hungry. “Catholic Social Teaching, rooted in the sacredness and fundamental

dignity of every human life, reiterates that all have a responsibility to care for creation, contribute to the common good, the well being of each and all, and respond with particular concern for the poor and afflicted.”¹³ Climate change is a justice issue affecting billions of poor around the world, ecosystems, species and the entire Earth. “There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic needs of all.”¹⁴ She declares that we need prophetic communities to look for long-term solutions embodying respect for the right to a fullness of life for all, in other words, global solidarity. Action items include the need to realize the interrelated, interdependence of our world. Keep in mind future generations. Fast and pray in solidarity with those who die of hunger daily. “Reflect on the culture and patterns of consumption . . . and take concrete steps to use God’s gifts wisely and to live sustainably, in harmony with all in the Earth community.”¹⁵ Educate about climate change, poverty, and food and the inherent moral obligations. Collaborate with others. Several resources provide additional information on the links between climate change and food.

Water

Perhaps one of the more disturbing ecologically-oriented *Resolutions* relates to the phenomenon of privatization of water.¹⁶ *Experience* provides the following statistics: over a billion people lack access to clean water; two billion are without adequate sanitation; pollution, waste, depletion, and overpopulation contribute to the crisis.¹⁷ What’s worse is that corporations recognize the scarcity and now view water as “blue gold” and encourage investment in water as a commodity. “Fortune Magazine of May 2000 stated: ‘Water promises to be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th century: the precious commodity that

determines the wealth of nations.”¹⁸ *Social Analysis* digs into the problematic social concerns surrounding the commoditization of water. She lists numerous trade agreements defining water as a commodity that work against countries that try to regulate water export. Serious flaws in this system include soaring water prices, deteriorating water quality, and corruption. *Reflection* states, “Water is crucial for the existence of all living beings” and is “recognized as a sacramental ‘commons’ revelatory of the presence of the Spirit throughout creation.”¹⁹ Citing multiple official statements, she relates the clarity of Catholic social teaching that water exists for the good of all. *Action* items include: know your water; ask representatives how the U.S. is contributing to the UN Millenium Development Goal to ensure access to fresh water and adequate sanitation; eliminate bottled water; educate on trade policies affecting water; change a personal water-use habit (shorter showers, eliminate chemical usage) being mindful of the sacredness of water.

Simplicity

Miriam Therese MacGillis, Director/Founder of Genesis Farm and a well-known “Green Sister,” wrote a compelling *Resolution* that could provide a viable solution for many environmental issues: choosing simplicity. *Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time*

begins:

*Carbon-offsets, ecological footprint, peak oil, global climate change, habitat loss, levels of toxicity . . . the list goes on and on. How are we to respond to these new dimensions of an ethical imperative which is core to the life of a vowed religious attempting to give witness to the presence of God in history?*²⁰

Utilizing Thomas Berry’s writings in collaboration with scientist Brian Swimme as primary source material, MacGillis explains the unity and interconnectedness of all things from the context of deep time. Starting with the smallest single cells and increasing through complexification into

the community of ecosystems on earth, all are life expressions of a single living being. The Beatitudes are the core of vowed religious life, but MacGillis urges sisters to consider the deeper meanings of poverty, chastity and obedience as considered through the lens of deep time, rooted in scientific principles that bind all species to the commons. The core of this *Resolution* lies in *Action* which she breaks down into personal and collective actions. MacGillis states, “Our actions, as always, must be a personal commitment to our own transformation and to the transformation of human culture . . . This truth can empower us to awaken from our own addiction to the industrial consumerist economic way of life which so violates the sacred web of life.”²¹ The actions she offers align with all of the other *Resolutions*. A sampling of suggested actions includes: enter the informal economy; refuse to buy new things; extend life of objects; keep things out of the landfill; support local businesses; support your community; withdraw from the corporate industrial food system; support local farmers; establish community gardens. MacGillis affirms, “we must discern everything we put into our bodies and the bodies of our children and the children of other species.”²² Simplify; de-clutter; “Resist the lure of ‘House Beautiful’ marketing which amplifies the disparity between rich and poor, and demands enormous use of Earth’s materials.”²³ Resist the privatization of water, conserve energy, travel minimally and encourage trip efficiency. She encourages sisters to “give retirement years to a greater cause. We have skills and resources that are needed now more than ever.”²⁴

Resolutions provide compelling data, moving personal reflections, connection with larger Catholic issues and social teaching, as well as practical actions from small and easy to big and difficult. Framing environmental damage as wrongs done to the poorest of society,

harming our neighbors, and endangering the life of future generations expands the notion of ecological sin.

From Resolution to Action

The Summary of LCWR Assembly Resolution Policy and Processes states, “the resolution process gives LCWR members a way of expressing their convictions about significant issues and of directing the Conference to act on those issues.”²⁵ Resolutions can be proposed by an LCWR Region, Committee or Task Force, or any group with at least 25 LCWR members. Resolutions must align with Conference goals, must envision a national or international scope, and must be possible to implement at local levels.

The LCWR represents over 80 percent of the 57,000 women religious in the United States.²⁶ The governmental structure with a presidency, governing board, and local regions, ensures geographic representation and encourages input from members at all levels. Membership is limited to those serving in leadership positions within congregations or provinces divided into 15 local regions. Regional chairs form the governing board. The presidency structure includes the president-elect, the president, and the former president, who collaboratively lead the organization over three-year terms.

Kansas belongs to Region 13, which includes Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Western Missouri. The region holds bi-annual meetings which offer the opportunity for an individual or group to propose a resolution. If the local region endorses it, it will be promoted and forwarded on to the governing board. Resolutions can also be drafted by standing committees. Local regions have the opportunity to provide input on resolutions before they are brought up at the Annual Meeting. This structure, in itself, reflects the rhizomic organizational style of

LCWR: one individual can identify a priority, her community can support that mission, the region can endorse it, then all represented communities can comment on the proposal, and finally leaders representing all LCWR communities vote on the resolution. If approved, it goes back out to all of the member communities for reflection.

Marcia Allen, current President of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, reflected, “the interesting thing is that most of us do not undertake the conference agenda in our communities. We have too much work to do as it is. However, there seems to be a mysterious meeting of minds – a universal intuition that causes most of us to be on the same page most of the time.” For instance, in 1989, leaders of both men and women religious discussed what religious life would look like in 2010. The group identified “current seeds and fleshed them out in what they called transformative elements,”²⁷ as listed below:

The Transformative Elements Articulated by the LCWR and the CMSM Conferences, August, 1989 (with references to ecological issues in parenthesis)

- *Prophetic Witness*
- *Contemplative Attitudes toward life (They will be attentive to and motivated by the presence of the sacred . . . throughout creation)*
- *Poor and Marginalized Persons as the Focus of Ministry*
- *Spirituality of Wholeness and Global Interconnectedness (Animated by their deep conviction of oneness of creation, religious in 2010 will live and work in a manner which fosters . . . reverence for the earth) (includes reference to Ilia Delio)*
- *Charism and Mission as Sources of Identity*
- *Change the Locus of Power (Religious . . . will be transformed by the poor, living a simpler life style that includes a reverence for the earth.)*
- *Broadbased Inclusive Community (How do we pray to become more citizens of the world?)*
- *Understanding Ourselves as Church*
- *Developing Interdependence among People of Diverse Cultures*

Sr. Marcia reflected, “As we looked back on them, we realized that we had spent quality time with each of these themes/goals and most communities were well on their way to have

accomplished them. *These foci had become foci within communities without, for the most part, any formal mandate or follow-up.*²⁸

The previous sections have all focused on broad issues – historical movements, theology, national priorities. While this is necessary to provide context, the focus will become increasingly narrow from this point forward. The following chapters will focus on the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, and their ecological awareness.

¹ Anne Munley, *Carriers of the Story: A Leadership Conference of Women Religious Ministry Study* (Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 2002), 83-84.

² Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 29.

³ Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 10-20.

⁴ Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 17.

⁵ Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious 1984, 3

⁶ Intercommunity Environmental Council Region 10 Members: Janet Kuciejczyk, CSJ; Corlita Bonnarens, RSM; Carol Reeb, SSND, "Reverencing the Earth," *Resolutions to Action* 13, no. 1, (2004).

⁷ The *Resolutions* cite data that was accurate at the time of publication but which may be outdated at the present reading. Extensive statistics on energy usage are available at <http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/>

⁸ The Environmental Protection Agency maintains updated information on CFL's, Energy Star appliances, and general efficiency measures (EnergyStar.gov) as well as an energy conversion calculator (<http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/calculator.html>).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dan Misleh, "Climate Change: Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk," *Resolutions to Action* 18, no. 3 (2007).

¹¹ Roxanne Schares, "Climate Change and Hunger," *Resolutions to Action* 18, no. 1 (2009).

¹² Misleh, "Climate Change."

¹³ Schares, "Climate Change and Hunger"

¹⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" (Vatican, June 29, 2004), accessed May 25, 2013.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

¹⁵ Schares, "Climate Change and Hunger"

¹⁶ Suzanne Golas, "Privatization of Water," *Resolutions to Action* 14, no. 3 (June 2005).

¹⁷ The United Nations posts updated statistics on the Global Water Crisis at <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Miriam MacGillis, "Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time," *Resolutions to Action* 18, no. 3 (July 2009)

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ LCWR, "Summary of LCWR Assembly Resolution Policy and Process," Updated August, 2012

²⁶ "About LCWR," LCWR, <https://lcsr.org/about>. Accessed May 25, 2013.

²⁷ Marcia Allen, CSJ, "Sabbatical Program at the Manna House of Prayer," 2010.

²⁸ Marcia Allen, CSJ, personal correspondence with author, May 14, 2013

Chapter 7: Early History of the Sisters of St. Joseph

The Sisters of St. Joseph were founded in 1650 by Father Jean Pierre Medalle, S.J., and six women who sought to live communally in union with God, each other, and their neighbors. Founded in LePuy, France, the community ministered to the fringes of society – the poor, homeless, orphaned, and dying.¹ The community expanded in ministry and members until the French Revolution when the societal upheavals severely affected the community. Refusing to take the oath of fidelity to the nationally established church, several women were imprisoned and sentenced to the guillotine. According to community histories, the day before they were to be executed, news broke out that Robespierre had been killed and the lives of Mother Saint John Fontbonne and three other sisters were spared. The community records indicate anywhere from two to seven martyrs, although recent research indicates two or at most three were killed during the French Revolution.² After the French Revolution, the community regrouped under the leadership of Mother Fontbonne in Lyon, France, with a focus on education and healthcare.

Frontier Ministry

In 1836, a handful of sisters came to the United States frontier, first to St. Louis, Missouri, and eventually to Kansas in 1883 under Mother Stanislaus Leary. The Catholic population in Kansas was growing at that time. The community moved to several locations before permanently establishing a home in Concordia, Kansas, where they built the Nazareth Convent and Academy in 1884. The community established many missions throughout Kansas and the United States, including St. Joseph's Hospital in Concordia (1903) & Marymount College in Salina, Kansas (1922). *Footprints on the Frontier* details the communities of the Sisters of St.

Joseph in the United States in 1947: the Concordia community boasted 553 members, operating one college, 17 high schools, 35 grade schools, 6 hospitals, 4 nurse training schools, and one orphanage, one 'sanitorium,' and one home for the aged.³ At that time, the Concordia community had no foreign missions,⁴ a situation that changed in 1963 with the formation of the mission in Teresina, Brazil, that continues to the present.⁵

The sisters focused on teaching and healthcare throughout Kansas. The community ran a dairy in Abilene to provide for orphans and the grounds of the motherhouse in Concordia were essentially a self-sufficient village with fruit trees, vegetable gardens, chickens, cows, pigs, etc. Sr. Ann Vincent Glatter, the gardener for the motherhouse for over 60 years, recalls:

During those early years, we had 87 fruit trees in our orchard . . . peaches and apples, plums, pears, apricots. Everything. We would pick 400 to 600 bushel of fruit and the day after we picked 20 to 23 bushels of cherries, which is 8000 cherries to a bushel. Then the next they would get the strawberry patch and pick 400 to 500 quarts of strawberries. For the first forty years, I suppose, we would pull 120 rhubarb each year, 100 bushel of tomatoes, 80 bushel of cucumber, 60 bushel of beans, and 40 bushel of beets, and 500 cantaloupe and 3000 roasting ears. Plus a lot of other things . . . We had a Sister Maxine in our kitchen here, every summer for 34 years she would can – not pints and quarts – but 2,500 to 3,000 gallons of fruits and vegetables that really provided much of the food that we processed through the winter months. And it was so tasty and good.⁶

The town quickly grew around the 42-acre community and the agricultural side of the convent diminished although Sr. Annie still maintained a sizable garden up until around 2010 when she retired and the community hired a local farmer to maintain the organic garden.

Changing Focus

The 1960's and 70's brought renewal and change for the sisters in Concordia, as well as all Catholics. Encouraged to reflect on the spiritual heritage of the congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia determined that faithfulness to the charism "required them to be women steeped in the spiritual life with an authentic sense of self, willing to serve the

“neighbor” wherever God might call.”⁷ Following the spirit of Vatican II, the community gradually shifted governance models from a mother general and chapters (up to 1969) to a President and Council with elected delegates. In 1979, the Senate was open to anyone interested in participating. Presently, the community has a Leadership Council with seven members and Sr. Marcia Allen is the community President.⁸

As times changed, the ministries increasingly addressed social justice and human rights. The Manna House of Prayer in Concordia and the Peace and Justice Center in Salina stay up to date on present issues, including a focus on immigration reform which began with declaration of sanctuary for refugees in the 1980’s and continues to the present day.⁹ The community advocates against the death penalty and supports peace movements. The sisters are not in schools and hospitals as much as they were in previous years, but they maintain a focus on caring for “dear neighbor” in unique ways: the recent Neighbor-to-Neighbor program helps local women in need, while Neighborhood Initiatives focuses on fostering community to sustain rural communities.

While all of the ministries are worthy of study, the focus here is on the growing environmental concern and resulting community actions. The environmental awareness of the CSJs in Concordia goes hand-in-hand with the ethic of non-violence which serves as a lens for all actions. On March 8, 1991, Senate Commitments enacted included “How We want to be with One Another” and “Reconciliation with the Earth,” results from which ultimately guide the activism present today.

“How We want to be with One Another”

In *State of the Heart and Order of the House: A Way of NonViolence*¹⁰, the CSJs addressed individual non-violence and community awareness. Citing the historical turmoil present in 1650's France at the time the congregation was founded, they contextualize the current movement toward non-violence:

*Today the world calls us to respond again in new ways, to look for meaning in a world and society that seems to have lost its way. We resonate with the call of the Earth Charter to live differently. Yet we are appalled by the horrors of our time . . . war, genocide, disease, global warming, the insensitivity to all inhabitants of Earth, and indifference to the life of Earth.*¹¹

Citing historical leaders in the global non-violence movement such as Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, they state that the Congregation of St. Joseph is called to the mission of “unioning” love, choosing “engagement over withdrawal, relationship and community over isolation and separateness, contemplation of the world instead of ignoring a world in need of healing and reconciling love.”¹² The State of the Heart refers to the individual while the Order of the House aligns with the larger community. Reflecting again models of rhizomic social change, the booklet addresses nonviolence for both the individual and the whole community. First, individuals reflect personally in contemplating recent life events and then sharing the individual reflections with the larger community, linking the experience to patterns, themes, scriptures or other events. Finally, the individual reflects on “movements within: What is moving in me now? Am I being drawn to something deeper? To gratitude? To action? What inclination or desires do I sense within? What is happening within me? In this way, I feel and interpret what I have contemplated.”¹³

The community listens to the individual stories and engages in communal contemplation, reflecting “together on how the Holy Spirit is moving among them, within their communal heart.”¹⁴ Shifting seamlessly from the individual to the community as a whole, the sections “State of the Heart” and “Order of the House” reflect the collaborative approach the sisters use to determine collective action based on individual inputs. The process is reciprocal, however, as the resulting community actions inform individuals of emerging issues. “Sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House is a tool to listen for the movement of the Spirit within the community. It can help us discern in an ongoing manner if we are being faithful to the mission and how we might minister to the needs of the “dear neighbor,” while being conscious of our gifts and limitations.”¹⁵

Reconciliation with the Earth

Focusing on “Reconciliation with the Earth,” a committee of five sisters collaboratively developed a journal for the community which was “designed to integrate inspiration with action” on the journey to “consciously work to heal our planet and ourselves.”¹⁶ The journal contains mostly blank pages with environmentally-themed quotes as journaling prompts. The introductory statement explains:

We believe our spirituality embraces contemplation of the presence of God, of each other, and the earth as our ‘dear neighbor’.

Therefore, we are committed

- *To awaken ourselves to a deep awareness of our interconnectedness with the earth*
- *To tap our collective wisdom and that of all creation*
- *To educate ourselves about the ‘New Story’*
- *To challenge ourselves to live in a mutually enhancing way which reconciles us with all of creation*
- *To think and to act differently as we break through to the Ecozoic Age*

Earth Lovers Committee (Virginia Pearl, Carm Thibault, Judy Stephens, Pat McLennon, Janet LeDuc)¹⁷

The community-wide prompts and educational opportunities would have presumably encouraged free thought on these issues that would have been captured in the Journal. Thomas Berry and Mary Southard visited the community at this time and sisters immersed themselves in learning “the New Story” individually and collectively through books and videos. Groups of women would meet in the pre-dawn hours to watch Brian Swimme’s videos while individuals read late into the evening. Many of the sisters interviewed cited this period of time as instrumental to their ecological awareness.

The journal is divided into sections: (1) Reflections: Day by Day, (2) Connections, (3) Awareness & Body Movement, (4) Events of the Year, (5) Seasons (6) Earth Actions, (7) Glossary, and (8) Bibliography. The *Reflections* section is primarily blank paper with scattered quotes to use as “jumping off points or simply as a backdrop to your own reflections.”¹⁸

Selected quotes include the following:

- *We bear the universe in our being even as the universe bears us in its being. –Thomas Berry*
- *We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying attention to other areas and to the well-being of future generations (par.6) Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. -- John Paul II*
- *The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything. – Julian of Norwich*
- *Our sentience, our feelings of wonder and awe, emerge out of the universe. We could not feel awe without the grandeur of the universe. These profound feelings are not just ours; they are the universe reflecting upon itself. – Brian Swimme*
- *And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles. No matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling, and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground of our feet, and learn to be at home. –Wendell Berry*
- *These new methods of food growing would diminish the exploitation of land in Third World countries by the more affluent countries, and would also assist countries all over the world to grow their own food. . . food should be grown and consumed locally . . . an exhausted planet is an exhausted economy. –Thomas Berry*

Connections begins with “WHERE YOU AT? – A Bioregional Quiz”¹⁹ that tests basic environmental perceptions of place. A sampling of questions follows:

- *Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap*
- *What soil series are you standing on?*
- *What were the primary subsistence techniques of the culture that lived in your area before you?*
- *Where does your garbage go?*
- *How long is the growing season where you live?*

The remaining chapters take a similar format as the initial chapter but focusing on specifics, such as, awareness & body movement, seasons and events. *Earth Actions* intends to lead the individual from the knowledge-base encouraged by previous chapters into meaningful action. The authors explain, “this section is here so that we can move as individuals into action . . . even very small steps are important . . . and as a community we can challenge ourselves as well.”²⁰ The first page is divided down the middle with a hand-drawn line ending in roots and hearts. On either side are the prompts: “What am I doing for the earth:” and “What would I like to do for the earth.” The second page is similarly divided but instead of roots at the bottom, there is a fully formed tree with branches reaching at the top. Similar prompts ask, “What we, as a community, are doing for the earth;” and “What we, as a community, might consider doing for the earth.” The imagery of a tree connects directly to the idea of community – the sisters themselves form the roots while the missions and activities of the community as a whole form the branches that extend outwards.

While it may come as surprise to most people that a group of sisters in rural Kansas was conducting Earth Literacy education, it was part of a larger movement among women religious that was going on at that time. Sr. Carm Thibault reflected that “it seems like when we did the thing on how to be with the earth, there was a wave of that going through all the communities at that time. It was like there was just a big wave and every community was kind of zeroing in. It’s almost like there’s a spirit moving through.”²¹ In the late 1980’s/early 1990’s, the

movement to focus on ecology encouraged individual communities and the LCWR as a whole to explore the topic in a variety of ways. Still, although they were not the only prophetic voice in the Catholic Church, the Sisters of St. Joseph were certainly visionary in relation to their geographical location.

A description of the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph could easily stop here. All of the information presented thus far is accessible to the public through libraries and the community archives. Yet, is it enough to describe your neighbor from articles about her in the paper and the gardens you view from across the street? Can that truly explain her understanding of ecological issues or why she chooses to do each thing? Certainly that would tell part of the story, but without even a simple conversation with the neighbor, the story is incomplete. Macro-level messages from the Vatican or the LCWR do not always translate to activities on the ground. Community oral histories capturing individual stories fill out the sweeping gestures and messages.

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- ¹ The history of the Sisters of St. Joseph available on their website (<http://www.csjkansas.org/about/history/>) and Sister Evangeline Thomas's history, *Footprints on the Frontier*, provide differing accounts of the martyrs. The current president, Sr. Marcia Allen, corrected these numbers citing recent research.
- ² Evangeline Thomas, CSJ, *Footprints on the Frontier* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1948), 18.
- ³ Thomas, *Footprints on the Frontier*, 363.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 363.
- ⁵ "Our Mission in Brazil" Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, accessed June 8, 2013.
<http://www.csjkansas.org/what-we-do/mission-in-brazil/>
- ⁶ Annie Glatte, CSJ, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on August 5, 2011.
- ⁷ "History" Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas.
- ⁸ Bernadine Pacht, CSJ, Personal correspondence with the author, May 14, 2013
- ⁹ "Immigration," Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, KS, accessed June 8, 2013.
<http://www.csjkansas.org/category/immigration/>
- ¹⁰ Bearers of the Tradition: Christy Cogil, CSJ, Theresa Kvale, CSJ, Janet Lander, CSJ, and Dottie Moss, CSJ, *State of the Heart and Order of the House*, (Sisters of St. Joseph, 2005).
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 4.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 5.
- ¹³ Marcia Allen, CSJ. *Obedience to Grace: Mary the Model*, (Bearers of the Tradition Institute, 2004)
- ¹⁴ Bearers of the Tradition, *State of the Heart and Order of the House*.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.
- ¹⁶ Earth Lovers Committee: Virginia Pearl, Carm Thibault, Judy Stephens, Pat McLennon, and Janet LeDuc, "The Earth Journal," (Sisters of Saint Joseph, 1993), no page numbers.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹ Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, Victoria Stockley, and Victoria, *Home: A Bioregional Reader*, New Society Publishers, 1990.
- ²⁰ Earth Lovers Committee, "The Earth Journal."
- ²¹ Carmela (Carm) Thibault, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on July 9, 2011.

Chapter 8: Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project

The Value of Personal Narratives

While a simple description of the events and activities of a religious community tells a story in itself, it requires the reader to extrapolate what moral or ethical underpinnings drive the action. Individual stories allow the reader – or listener – to see how nature came to matter to the speaker, how she grew to appreciate it in new ways and the relationship she hopes to have with it in the future. Narratives offer descriptions of individual understandings and a framework to organize experiences that influenced the story teller. Hearing a person’s story allows an outsider to gain purchase or establish a foothold in that person’s reality through the telling of the story. In “Some Challenges for Narrative Accounts of Value,” Katie McShane explains the power of narrative: “We understand our individual selves as selves through narrative: our stories tell us who we are and how we got to be this way . . . our stories tell others who we are and what to expect from us; further, our stories actually make us who and what we are.”¹ Personal accounts provide access to an alternate data set that is more approachable than standard facts and figures and grounds the broad statements of the church and the LCWR in present realities. While the “green” movement is becoming more mainstream, motivations for undertaking high-profile environmental actions are not necessarily clear. Greenwashing, or using “greenness” as a marketing ploy, is increasingly problematic. Converting grounds to a community garden could simply be a response to a requirement to fulfill an organization’s sustainability initiatives. “A narrative account of value offers us an explanation of how environmental goods came to matter to us in such specific ways, and why

those ways differ so greatly across times, cultures, and particular people.”² Individual stories are valuable and can be powerful.

Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project

The Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project documented the beginnings, growth, and development of environmental awareness, as told by individual sisters. The activities of the community present one side of the story while the individual narratives fill out the actions, presenting both individual and community development. Most of the women interviewed entered the community as young adults and formed a sense of self in connection to the larger community. During interviews, it was often difficult to tease out an individual’s accomplishments or opinions as separate from the whole. Further, most of them entered the community before Vatican II when there was very little room for individuality; the community was everything. While many sisters left the convents after Vatican II, the sisters interviewed for the Green Sisters project chose to stay, embracing the new forms of community life.

During the summer of 2011, the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Oral History Project began to document the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas. The study was funded through an Oral History Grant from the Schlessinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. During two-hour-long guided interviews, sisters expressed their personal histories, steps toward awareness and activism, theological understanding, and hopes for the future, all with regard to ecological issues. A total of 15 sisters were interviewed as well as three of the convent staff and three of the community’s college-aged live-in volunteers. Additional documentation was collected from the community’s

extensive archives. Interviews took place during two visits to the community of three days each and via follow up emails and conversations. Interviewees completed an anonymous evaluation to provide feedback on the experience, which was immediately incorporated to strengthen the project, and to contribute to the confidence of the community in the process (see Appendix 4 for complete evaluation results). In the two years since the interviews began, I have maintained steady contact with several sisters via email, visited the convent in March 2013 to conduct an informal assessment of the current status of members' environmental activism, and I presented research findings to the whole community at the annual Assembly Days and Jubilee in June.

Developing ecological awareness does not happen overnight. Often it is a long journey assimilating information from multiple areas. Environmental activism or ecological awareness are broad terms encompassing efforts towards sustainability, environmental conservation, care for creation, and eco-justice, among many others. The documentation takes the form of audio-recorded conversational interviews with guiding questions relating to one's individual experiences and journey of understanding. While every interview is different, below are a few "sample questions" that were asked in interviews.

- *What were your first experiences with nature?*
- *What has inspired or sustained you?*
- *What are the most critical aspects of this mission? (water conservation, habitat preservation, organic methods, recycling, composting) Why? What do you feel has the most impact and who do you feel gains the most?*
- *Tell me about a time when you really felt that your work had been accomplished.*
- *If you could impart wisdom to a young person whose actions will change the future, what would you say?*
- *What do you hope to see in 10 years?*

Most of the interviews started with a story of the first experiences in nature. This was a theme in the Earth Journal and many nature writers tell similar stories. For instance, Thomas Berry frequently referenced a powerful experience in a meadow. Just eleven years old at the time, he recalled that this experience “gave to my life something, I know not what, that seems to *explain my life at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember.*” This moment in time made a deep impression that served as a measuring stick for all things to come. He continues:

*Yet as the years pass, this moment returns to me, and whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes that I have given my efforts to, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life. **This early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; what is opposed to this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive.***³

While this account provides the individual spark of awareness, it also relates the maturity of his understanding over time, reflecting that Berry’s reality was deeply rooted in, and reflectively shaped by, this experience. Hans Georg Gadamer’s notion of horizons provides a visual representation of the development of awareness prompted by a lifetime of events and dialogue.⁴ We are the culmination of a series of historical events; as you move and change throughout life, your experiences influence your understandings or your horizons. Ideally, as new inputs are introduced into the dialogue of life, horizons of past realities fuse with the present view to create an expanded understanding. Oral histories capture the roots and accounts of events that shaped individual lives. An individual life story relating the journey towards ecological understanding reflects this original sense of place, growth and expanding horizons. Interviews often started with an account of an experience in nature, then proceeded

through childhood and growth until a sister joined the community. From that point on, it was often difficult to separate the individual from the community. Viewing the individual as an integral part of a larger community expands the awareness one step further, as seen in individual accounts of sisters working within and affecting their communities while the communities equally impact and affect them.

In essence, a woman relates a story of growth starting with a profound experience of the divine in nature. Discordant events, like the use of DDT on the farm, cause her to re-evaluate her previous understanding leading to a growing awareness of the dangerous effects of chemicals on the larger whole. This woman's horizon expanded over time with the new inputs of modern society and ultimately fused these inputs into a seamless understanding of the impacts of chemicals on the world and, perhaps most importantly, the possible solutions. However, this understanding did not develop in a vacuum. This woman interacted with many other women in an intentional community who worked as one unit incorporating the voices of the many, as part of an even larger national community and global church. Her story presents one piece of the larger work, the new story of awareness of human impacts on the earth and is, in turn, influenced by all of the other pieces that make the whole. As Sr. Bernadine explained:

One night it finally hit me that we're not a collection of objects but a community of subjects. You know that's just a bunch of rote words in a sense. But the whole thing. . . . You know, this bug has an important existence too. I mean it was this whole (understanding) and that didn't happen over-night.⁵

Individual insights, community actions

True to insights of deep ecology, every action has an impact on the ecosystem as a whole; the individual is integral to the local community, the community to the bioregion, the bioregion to the earth, the earth to the universe. Themes of Catholic social teaching, ecology,

and science emerge alongside justice, nonviolence and community as the sisters recall the continuous feedback loop of individual awareness affecting the community and vice versa. Excerpts from individual stories can be shaped to create a contrived narrative demonstrating individual and community journey towards ecological awareness.

Every story contributes to the knowledge of the whole. Taking it a step further, if an oral history of a single sister can represent a community, as often happens in histories spanning multiple communities, then the individual story can be considered a metaphor for the whole community. The statement: “the sisters work with immigrants on the border” is true although very few of “the sisters” have actually been to El Paso. Similarly, one woman talking about ecology and interconnectedness would not be enough to speak for the whole; however, gaining the stories of many women reflects the larger picture, as early field notes from the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Project illustrate:

The first time I visited the community, in January of 2011, I had a pretty good idea of what I would find. I wanted to hear about the Great Depression and community, Vatican II, women’s issues, etc. I will never forget the interview with Sr. Bernadine Pacht, one of the first in the morning after a pre-dawn drive. She kept bringing the interview back to ecological issues. Recycling. Eating low on the food chain. It was not what I expected to hear so I kept overlooking it. It wasn’t until several other women commented on ecology, as well, that I had to acknowledge this phenomenon.⁶

Individual stories reflect the ways the community came to focus on ecological priorities and community activities, in turn, shaped the awareness of the individuals creating interconnecting stories. As Thomas Berry commented, “It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.”⁷ Thomas Berry’s insights profoundly impacted the Green Sisters in Kansas as

well as the national movement. Nonetheless, it is *Thomas Berry's* story; it is his personal interpretation of events reflecting his own growth and understanding as influenced by many others, as Mary Evelyn Tucker skillfully relates:

*It is a **story of personal evolution** against the background of cosmic evolution. It is the **story of one person's intellectual history** in relation to Earth history. It is the **story of all of our histories** in conjunction with planetary history. **It is a story awaiting new tellings, new chapters, and ever deeper confidence in the beauty and mystery of its unfolding.**⁸*

Taken in this light, the stories of individuals influenced by Berry's work are equally important and add to the understanding of the phenomena he addresses. The stories collected in the Green Sisters project give new tellings, provide additional chapters, and expand the scope of our understanding of the human place within the world into what will I hope be a narrative that appeals to the minds of the Heartland.

The stories of the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas are firmly rooted in the rural landscape, told by women who grew up in the wake of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, who remember the first time chemicals were used on the farm and who understand now the devastating effects chemicals have on the environment, but who weigh that understanding with the realities of rural life and the global economy.

¹ Katie McShane, "Some Challenges for Narrative Accounts of Value." *Ethics & the Environment* 17 no. 1 (2012):49.

² *Ibid*, 52.

³ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 13.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience." In *The Phenomenology Reader*, edited by Tim Moody and Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 1960), 314-338.

⁵ Bernadine Pacht, CSJ, 2011.

⁶ Rachel Myslivy, "Field Notes from January 2011 visit to Nazareth Convent and Academy," 2011.

⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 123.

⁸ Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Biography of Thomas Berry," Thomas Berry Foundation, accessed June 8, 2013. <http://www.thomasberry.org/Biography/tucker-bio.html>.

Chapter 9: The Sisters tell their Stories

Early Experiences in Nature

The Sisters of St. Joseph are women with diverse backgrounds and life experiences. While the journey towards environmental awareness is unique for everyone, many sisters cited early experiences in nature as formative in cultivating an environmental awareness fundamental to their continued efforts. In “Foundations of Place,” David Gruenwald describes the importance of place, “as centers of experience, places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped.”¹ We are inherently shaped by the places we inhabit – both past and present. Sr. Marcia Allen recalls an early event in her native place, highlighting family bonds and outdoor education, but also reflecting a connection with the divine that directed her on a path to being a sister of St. Joseph.

I grew up in Plainville, KS, which is in the valley between the Solomon River and the Saline. Saline on the South, Solomon on the north, and Plainville was built on what was called Paradise Creek which ran between the two rivers. Plainville was a little, tiny town and I was born probably not too long before the oil boom increased in size and importance, but, I think what formed my religious life or spiritual life, whatever it is, was that my father absolutely loved the outdoors, so we spent every Saturday and Sunday trekking through western Kansas and through that valley between the two rivers, looking for arrowheads, looking for different kinds of birds and trees, you name it. He loved the outdoors and he taught us birds and rocks. We loved rocks. So I grew up loving all those things. It's a wonderful memory of how we spent our weekends as kids . . . behind my dad . . . walking along. He'd go ahead because of snakes and stuff, but

My first questions about who is God came as a result of those treks. Because we would go out to what was called Dean Hill and that was a large, cliff-like thing, large for Kansas, I should say, overlooking the Saline River. My dad loved to stand there and he would look east, and he would look west and he would say, “Looky there, Marcia, look what God has done.” And I would stand there and think, “I wonder who God is. . .” So I

think that was the foundation of my exploration and wondering and wanting to know who was God that could do all this.²

Several sisters made similar remarks relating to experiential nature awareness. Many had chores on the farm; as Sr. Ginger Pearl related, “I helped in the garden from the time I could walk.”³ Outdoor activities were simply a part of life in rural America. Sr. Regina Ann recalled:

We were barefoot most of the time because we saved shoes for school. But I remember walking in the fields after dad had plowed with his walking plow and horse and the soil was so nice and cool and it would be great. Then I would go out in the woods and sit under sycamore trees and watch squirrels and birds and . . . I think I stood on stumps more than once and preached to the birds. (laughs) We were always very much in touch with nature.⁴

While the majority of the sisters grew up “on the farm,” many spent much of their adult lives in a variety of urban settings in professions primarily relating to healthcare, education and counseling. A few who spent their youth in urban areas indicated that they felt they confronted a learning curve to catch up with those sisters who grew up mostly out-of-doors, saying things like, ‘You should ask Sister so-and-so about that. I don’t know as much about it as she does because she grew up on a farm. But I’m trying to learn.’ Still, many of the sisters who grew up in urban areas remember powerful connections with nature from early childhood experiences. These experiences in nature had profound effects on the sisters. While their life journeys often took them far from home in areas with little direct access to nature, they all hold that these experiences were never far from their hearts. Sisters repeatedly noted that whenever an opportunity arose to take a vacation or a retreat – or even just to get away for a few hours – they often would seek out a location replete with the splendor of creation in order to recreate that experiential connection, as Sr. Janet relates:

I grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles. During my growing up years, some of my happiest memories are linked to camping trips and times out in nature, whether it be

with family or with girl scouting. I would have to say that as a child, besides the formal religious education I received in Catholic school from kindergarten all the way up, I also had what I would call God experiences while I was out in nature.

Nature became for me a meeting place with God. It wasn't like every time I went outdoors I had this incredible experience, but over the years, on and off, I would have a sense of God in the beauty or in the action of creation. So, I really grew to love the outdoors, not just as the location for having a good time, but in itself. That something about creation was very alive and inviting and holy to me. So, that continued into early adulthood when I became interested in religious life in my late teens. That whole sense of call really didn't have anything to do with creation directly. It was something else that was moving in me. But in my early years in religious life, I continued to spend time outdoors when I was praying or when I had a choice over what kind of vacation break or retreat house I would visit. I'd always look for some place of beauty. So, that was always a place . . . creation was a place where I renewed myself.⁵

Incongruity

Sisters also told of disturbing experiences in youth that led to continuous questioning of the status quo. Sr. Regina Ann Brummel recalled her mother's reaction when the people of Boonville started using plastic bags to dispose of trash. "She was really struck by that." Her mother would say, "You know that stuff doesn't rot, where are they going to put all that? That doesn't rot, that's just going to fill up someplace." Sr. Regina Ann commented, "Well, she had not gone beyond the 8th grade but she knew that was not going to be good for the environment."⁶ Similarly, Carm Thibault reflected when chemicals came into their lives:

We always had a large garden . . . and this was something mom enjoyed and of course we all helped with that. I don't know how many potato bugs we pulled off the plants in the summers and stuff like that. And as I think about we always stuck them in a little jar with gasoline which wasn't the best thing to do but anyway, we did it. See we weren't that organized at that time, or we weren't thinking organically at that time necessarily, but the garden really fed us you know . . . it's totally different now, of course. With the use of fertilizers . . . and that began to happen . . . in the last 30 years . . . when they began to irrigate in that area from the Webster Dam and now there's not enough water to do that anymore. And then they began using the fertilizers which really made the corn grow . . . and it . . . looked like a great success, you know what I mean? But my mother during those times would say the water is getting harder and it's getting harder and that all of that was affecting the earth and so I always say it's takes such a long time for us to

understand how we are affecting the earth and one another that we have live to be a 1000 years to really see what has happened DDT came around and everyone heard about DDT, it killed all those weeds⁷ . . . and my dad had a little deal with a little plunger in it and he would go around and we'd spray different weeds and my mother did too, and it was just wonderful . . . and of course we had no idea what that meant . . . and the farmers you know, it was a brand new thing , it was wonderful they weren't thinking necessarily about the long term. DDT was discovered to be a poison, you know, and we should never have been using it. But we did, we were ignorant. But now that we are not ignorant we better be trying to do things differently.⁸

In *An Ethics of Place*, Mick Smith commented, “we see things the way we do and are the way we are because of the times and places we exist in. . . our culture’s ‘prejudices,’ in the very broadest sense of the word, are constitutive of our being. Because of this situatedness we have limited horizons that place boundaries on our comprehension of self and others.”⁹ Carm Thibault’s story about chemical usage on the farm reflects her early prejudice – it was wonderful, “it killed all those weeds!” The horizon of the past, which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. The horizon of the present is determined by historical horizons and prejudices that we carry, according to Gadamer. Genuine understanding occurs when there is a fusion of horizons merging the past, present and everything in between. Which is not to say that past prejudices are simply subsumed to create a smooth, unified vision. Rather, the new vision reflects all previous realities and holds them ready to apply to future situations.

Judy Stephens recalls a similar time in her youth:

When I was young, why, sprays came into use. DDT and other sprays. From the beginning I was terrified of that. I remember where we milked the cows there was a room for the separator and then you would wash it afterwards. We would always shut the door and . . . put the fly spray in there and shut the door and then run out. I thought, you know, if that kills the flies, what does that do to us?. . . And of course, all the reports say that it doesn't . . . there's no damage and it doesn't hurt you and there's no effect. I think we don't measure the effect. I think we only measure it later when birth defects show up. Like, I just read a report about round-up ready herbicide that they use on soybeans and corn. Particularly soybeans. Finally they are documenting that it does cause genetic . . . or that it does cause birth defects in babies. So, you know, it's amazing

*that we're not interested in studying that or researching that or publishing that or worrying about it . . . and then the rate of cancer. I mean, we kind of all now expect to die of cancer. I think it's a result of the way we have treated the environment.*¹⁰

Taking the above excerpts as examples, the past horizon was the early days on the farm. When chemicals came on the scene it appeared at first to be a good thing for Carm but was disturbing to Judy. When Rachel Carson told of a future with no birds due to the toxic DDT, both women successfully integrated the implications of this new information into their existing understanding, and ultimately fused horizons between the past and present. Taking this still further, they both felt that the actions of the past were erroneous and that we should be doing better now – studying the connections between herbicides and increased health problems. Although neither excerpt specifically mentioned it, both adopted organic gardening methods as a direct result of these experiences. These excerpts reflect successfully fused individual horizons, linking the past rural life to modern day problems in a seamless transition, as well as successfully fused group horizons as the influences of both of these women (and many others) led to the adoption of organic methods on the grounds and a community garden to extend those benefits to the larger community of Concordia.

Just as the early experiences in nature were positive and helped the sisters cultivate a love of God, these questions and concerns surrounding chemicals and waste stuck with them throughout the years. Several reference Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as hugely influential in directing individual and community awareness.

*That kind of tipped everything off and for me personally, or from within the congregation, I think it's probably when we . . . really started doing something . . . We had an assembly where we identified what issues we were going to work on. So we decided we would spend an entire year talking about how we wanted to be with planet Earth. Reconciliation with the Earth.*¹¹

These negative or discordant experiences in youth ultimately led to positive changes in individuals and the larger community. Judy's quote further illustrates the blurred distinctions between individual and community frequent in interviews. Sisters would often start with a "me" statement ("for me personally") and then correct it to reflect the community, ("or from within the congregation.")

Reconciliation

Ultimately, the sisters want to be relevant and address the needs of present times – whatever those might be. Sisters focus on self-cultivation and group education, discernment, and – most importantly, focus on living true to the charism of the community. One of the sisters commented that it's hard to do long-range planning in an ever-changing world. Horizons are constantly in motion, influenced by the past while actively shaping past understandings to fit present situations. Gadamer clarifies that a horizon is "something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving."¹² The sisters are always on the move.

In the early 1990's the community formed the Earth Lovers Committee¹³ and took on the task of discerning "how to be with each other" and "how to be with the earth." This period of time was highly influential to the community and was cited in nearly every interview. The community focus on the earth took on group and individual activities. This period of discernment left many lasting effects on the congregation, not the least of which is the ethic of non-violence which functions as a lens through which all should be viewed, as Sr. Patricia (Pat) McClennon elaborated:

All of it's interrelated, all of us are interrelated. So when we talk about our charism as Sisters of St. Joseph is to bring about union and unity, it's more than one to one. I mean,

one time I was serving on the Earth Lovers committee. What we were really dealing with was the land issues at that time, but the Earth Lovers was really a concept of what we say is our spirit is related to love of God, love of neighbor, love of all creation. That's where the focus was for that committee, for the community. Right now we have the non-violence, we see non-violence as the focus that gives life and direction to the whole sense of union and unity. In that whole sense of nonviolence, we see that as related to nature, creation, people, poverty, abuse, abuse of the land, abuse of people, destruction.¹⁴

The sisters sought to understand the spiritual charism of their congregation to care for “the other as Dear Neighbor.” It was through this process that the sisters came to view the earth and all of creation as “dear neighbor” and vowed to care for that relationship appropriately. The “Earth Lovers” Committee created the “Earth Journal” as a means to achieve this understanding and appreciation for creation. Journaling is a commonly used technique for spiritual strengthening and discernment among the sisters. The Earth Journal truly brings together the often misunderstood dichotomies of science and religion in an attempt to gain knowledge of ecology, a sense of place, and a larger perspective of issues relating to the earth. Through this journaling process, sisters educated themselves in order to achieve an understanding which would bring about right actions. They studied issues relating to ecology, cosmology, and eco-spirituality. Topics in the Earth Journal ranged from “what is the name of the watershed where you live” to “what were your first experiences in nature.” Carolyn Teter recalled:

When I really got interested in the environment was when we had the Earth (Journal) . . . our relationship with the earth and we began to understand the earth as the Dear Neighbor, you know because that's the charism of the Sisters of St Joseph – union of God and others with the dear neighbor. When we really said, well, we are so one. We have this great web of life and we are all interconnected with everyone, and everything, and the earth . . . and that's the 'dear neighbor'! We have to begin to consider how we can be responsible and love the earth as the 'dear neighbor.' So that was exciting.

Thomas Berry came and Brian Swimme - we watched all of his videos . . . and we became so excited. What can we do? It has to be more than recycling, but that's the only thing

we could think of, which we did with great energy! But what I've begun to see is that . . . it's really a theological reason why we have such a . . . 'I don't feel responsible for the earth,' [attitude] because God is other worldly and there is this Chasm between God and the world. All of our spirituality in the past has been 'you must leave the world, the world is evil,' and now we see that God is at the center and Jesus Christ and the risen Christ is at the center and the heart of the whole evolutionary process which is moving us all towards greater unity with this love energy.

I have a hard time talking about that, but . . . somehow or other, we're responsible. Who else is going to do it? We are . . . and with the big bang, that makes us part of everything. We're made from the star dust. We are all one. So our job is to bring about this oneness, this wholeness, so we can be a community that is just and has an equitable future. Peace. Harmony. Love.¹⁵

Carolyn Teter's explanation presents a dizzying amount of information, skipping across time and topic. She ties the community development and educational process with the ecological priorities, the ecological priorities to the charism of the community, to individual and community actions, to influences, to theological dominion and escapism theology, personal responsibility, evolution, unity, the big bang, oneness, social justice and equity! The quote reflects the many activities and influences present in the journey the community took to understand how to be with each other and how to be with the earth. This complicated understanding is similarly experienced in the larger discussion on environmental ethics, "we are starting to see that the well-being of humans and the well-being of nature are interdependent. Thus we are realizing that our current eco-catastrophe is not only a biological crisis but a crisis of consciousness and culture."¹⁶

Inspiration

While the sisters had a strong and supportive learning community they also looked to scripture and Catholic theologians for enrichment. They found inspiration in each other, in the

practices and teachings of the Catholic faith, and in scripture, but also in environmental and political writings and in scientific discoveries and explanations.

Many sisters expressed the feeling that the community and individual sisters within that community were a constant source of inspiration. Sisters commented that the wisdom of others impacted them in many different ways. For instance, Sr. Ginger talked about sisters who grew up in western Kansas who had a different relationship with the wind than she did. An entire thesis could be written just on the influences individuals had on each other and not all can be connected here. However, without being named in each interview, the experience of Sr. Jeanette Wasinger was frequently referenced. Jeanette had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer and chose to embrace it rather than adopt the violent language of cancer. For years, she taught journaling retreats. She helped to develop the Earth Lovers Journal and felt that this method of retreat was extremely useful:

You look at persons, your relationship to persons, events, society, your body, the spiritual world, the earth. It's so unifying and, yeah, more and more I see that has just been a great gift. And now that I have been diagnosed with terminal cancer that has sustained me because I have related to my body so well. I call cancer my sacred guest. It has a place in my life. I don't fight cancer. I think nonviolence is very important. A few years ago we made a commitment to nonviolence. That to me, has been the greatest decision we've made since I entered 53 years ago because I think it's what the world needs. And again it relates to environment and how to be one with the earth and with the world. I am very serious about that. I work at it. And so I'm just, I've re-tooled my language and tried to refine my way of thinking.¹⁷

Her radical commitment to non-violence was inspirational to others while her understanding of the connection of non-violence with our relationship with the earth was frequently repeated.

Further, it should be noted that cancer is not rare among the sisters and many commented that

they felt the high rates of cancer are directly related to the way we treat the environment, as detailed in Judy Stephens and Carm Thibault's accounts above.

Sisters cited several scriptural references as inspirational, including the creation story in Genesis, sections of the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, and the book of Revelation. Often mentioned was that Jesus is frequently seen as praying in nature. The scriptural phrase most often quoted was John:17-21,

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The concept that "All is One" is foundational for the sisters' theology and it is also reflected in the founding documents of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia. Father Jean-Pierre Medaille (1610-69), S.J.'s *Eucharistic Letter* reflects this focus:

Jesus speaks of [the] double union in profoundly moving terms when he asks his Father that all the faithful be one, 'that they be perfectly one' in Him and in God His Father, in the same way as He and His Father are one.' (John 17:21)

Here, my dear Sister, is the purpose of our selfless congregation: it tends to achieve this total double union

- *of ourselves and the dear neighbor with God,*
- *and of ourselves and all others, whoever they may be,*
- *of all others among themselves and with us, but totally in Jesus and in God His Father¹⁸*

The sisters followed this vision to the fullest degree of understanding, seeing the earth, the plants, the animals, the people as well as the sun, the moon, and the myriad galaxies equally important parts of the most beautiful system created by an awesome God. As Sr. Carm reflected, focusing only on the earth is "not enough anymore. That's too small. You have to go

much further than this and that's why I would often use stars [in my artwork] I put stars out here because it goes so much further than anything . . . "19 Gadamer's definition of the horizon is "everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."20 This view, however, is not limited to a flat horizon, but includes the view above and below, as well, creating not just linked circles of horizons, but a sphere of complete understanding. While this may take Gadamer's fusion of horizons further than he intended, it follows ecological thinking. The horizon is not two-dimensional, the world is not flat, it is a sphere with horizons in all directions. It is not just the world on which we stand or the things that we see that humans impact, but the whole system of the earth and the system of which the earth is a part, the larger universe and expanding galaxies. Judy Stephens brought along an impressive book called *Cosmos* to share, which she used to explain her understanding:

When we look out at night everything looks dark, but to realize that if you were somewhere in there and you looked out everything would be dark, but from a distance - how much the intensity of the light! I mean the size of this universe and the direction of the universe. They think we're all expanding outwards, where is it going? Is it going to come back? You know, I don't know. It just raises so many things to think about who we are, who God is, who is this God? I mean it's just unbelievable . . . Who can answer, "What is God?" God is . . . I mean, how can . . . how can . . . if this is the universe that we are in then how much grander is our God. Has to be.

So, this is the deepest meditation for me. Oh, it's a meditation . . . the immensity, the immensity of it, it expands you inside to know that we're all connected, makes you know that we are made of stardust. We're made of all the same elements. I mean . . . how these elements came together. I lack for words. To me, Genesis is a story that tells us how this universe came to be from with the words or the language of someone of that era. So, this is the same story in picture of today of how our universe came to be. I think it's the same story. It's hard to preach that in church, because not everyone makes that transition, so you have to know that . . . you have to come to see that the Bible teaches a truth in the words of the people of those days, that time.

The common ground is the universe. I respect people's religious views or scientific views and leave it at that. I don't think you can convince people one way or the other. Or at least I can't. I mean some people look at all of this and say it's just a big bang that

*happened out of energy. The gasses came together and it all happened. I don't need to say . . . I could say the same thing, but I say that that life, that energy, that force, that God is there in All.*²¹

Organic Gardening

The CSJs embrace organic gardening principles and practices and seek to educate the larger community on the benefits. They established the Community Garden of Hope a few years back and are converting increasingly more of the grounds to organic gardens. For a modest \$13 a year, a community member can rent a 12 foot by 46 foot plot so long as s/he adheres to the principles of organic gardening and maintains the plot appropriately. Sr. Betty Suther commented, "We plowed up this section and made 26 plots and said well, we'll just put an article in the paper and advertise it. I was hoping we'd get ten or so, we had all 26 and people were so excited about doing it. This year, we had a sign up and whoosh, just like that they were filled with a waiting list. It's been an interesting way to get the community involved."²²

The 26 plots are always full and the sisters have expanded the garden each year since it was established to meet the demand. In my June 2013 visit to the community, I saw that the gardens were thriving and noticed that several large compost tumblers, a toolshed, and a bench were all added since my initial visit in 2009. The sisters related that the gardens provided wonderful community building opportunities as folks spanning the socio-economic spectrum of Concordia work together to battle pests using these new methods. Gardeners swap produce and discuss ways to preserve the harvest. The sisters have transitioned their own garden to uphold organic principles and hired a local farmer to help with the work. The decision to shift to organic can be seen as both upholding the traditions of the community and embracing the

new environmental awareness. Sr. Betty Suther recalled that there were differing opinions as the transition to organic began:

People would say, "Oh, you can't do that!" but others would say, "I'm glad you're doing that! I couldn't do it, but I'm sure glad you are!" Once in a while people would criticize Stephen (the gardener) because in the beginning he couldn't keep up with the weed control. Others would say, "how come the weeds are so tall?!" but then they're not involved, they're just looking. Well, the garden, the big garden has been going on since the beginning. Since we started the Motherhouse, they've always had a garden. But Annie had done it since she started probably in the '50's or '40's. So it's a tradition in our community to have a garden, but it kept shrinking as time went on. The place where that parking lot (is) that was all garden. It's been in our tradition and that's why I wanted to keep it going. It's been organic for about five years now. That's when we got strict about it and said, "no, we're not going to put chemicals in it."²³

The sisters work together with the gardener to plant, tend and harvest the crops. Many commented that it was so refreshing to go out to the garden and help or even that they enjoyed the walk out to the compost pile to discard their scraps or just to see what was growing in the garden. The kitchen staff at the Motherhouse use the produce in meals but the sisters also help to preserve the harvest. Sr. Betty Suther explained that processing the bounty was one of her roles:

I don't do too much canning, we mostly freeze things but we do make jellies and put those up and I do pickles. I've never used a pressure cooker. I mean, it's one of those stories where my mother would yell, "Get out of the house, kids, we're going to put the pressure cooker on! If it blows up. . .!" (laughs) I grew up like that. I never used a pressure cooker!²⁴

Energy

The historic motherhouse poses a problem for sustainability. Windows were replaced within the past few years to make it more efficient, but yet issues of energy management are ever-present. It is clear that many wish they could do more to offset usage but finances hold

the community back. The community purchased compact fluorescent light bulbs in bulk and switched out the older bulbs en masse. Apparently, the electric bills have gone down as efficiency measures increase which lead to a stronger commitment to energy efficiency.²⁵ An energy audit identified areas for improvement and determined that a wind turbine would make the motherhouse almost 100% self-sustaining. Unfortunately, such an expense is beyond the reach of the sisters at the present time. They have plans in place to purchase wind turbines to offset the usage of the Motherhouse as Judy said, “if we were ever able to afford a wind turbine.”²⁶ The topic of energy alternatives came up in many interviews and it is clearly on the minds of the sisters. It is certainly an area to watch in the future as these technologies become more affordable.

Awakening others

The sisters seek to live in right relation with creation, which includes reaching out to share their joy and understanding with others. When asked who would benefit the most from the activism, Sr. Anna Marie Broxterman commented, “I think the local environment changes, I think of our mayor, he said the sisters are the moral conscience of Concordia. Boy, that’s really quite a compliment. Interestingly enough it is connected to morality . . . Going green is . . . it’s a moral issue.”²⁷ Sr. Janet Lander used the analogy of the “seamless garment” to illustrate the interrelatedness of everything, that once you learn about one issue you have to readjust your actions to this new awareness.

*I think when I came to a different sort of place was when I started studying social justice issues and realized that if we were to reverence all life, that all life includes the rest of creation. So, I cannot be a single-issue justice person. That if I’m going to reverence life, then I am pro-life about human beings at all levels of their existence or at all times in their existence, but I am pro-life for all other parts of creation as well. It’s a **seamless garment**. So, I cannot pick and choose and say some forms of killing are fine and other*

*forms are morally wrong. But, in terms of being very mindful of not wanting to eat a lot of pesticide - foods that have been grown in pesticides - or being mindful about not buying into the consumer culture or the shop-till-you-drop routine or being mindful of recycling my paper. So, these kinds of practices became important to me because it's about the dignity of all life. Social justice.*²⁸

At the Manna House of Prayer, the community-run spiritual retreat center, the book store contains many titles such as, 'The Cosmic Christ,' many works by Thomas Berry and Teilhard de Chardin, as well as cards by Sr. Carm Thibault that reflect the community's commitment to ecologically oriented spirituality. They have held film screenings, lecture series, theological institutes and informal discussions on issues relating to environmental and eco-justice principles. For example, Ilia Delio led a theological institute entitled "Evolutionary Christianity: Hope for the Future" in 2012 and Sr. Carolyn Teter recently discussed "Exploring the Spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin." As women religious who live integrated into society, and often among the lowest ranks of society, many of the sisters heed the call to care for creation by introducing nature to others. Julie Christensen, the youngest member of the community, spelled out the connections between nature awareness and experiential learning:

I'm challenged by how to encourage people to fall in love (with nature) but I think the more experiential, the more opportunity presents itself. You know, like getting kids out and giving them the opportunity to play in the dirt and pull up beets. What's it like to pull up beets? What's it like to pick beans? Those things. Those little . . . yeah, it's hot, but if you have fun with them, it's kind of cool. I think a lot of it revolves around balance and eliminating some of the stimuli that we're so constantly in need of and providing them with another stimulus that is kind of like . . . like a camp fire . . . that is not the computer. Getting kids onto the edge of something that is exciting but not necessarily like . . . I think with TV . . . the way that kids think they need to be on the edge is through drugs and pornography and sex and things like that. They need those experiences that are bound to help them mature. They need them. They need to feel like they're on the edge in order to grow. So, providing them the opportunity to experience what it's like to go out and randomly pick, and climb trees and pick cherries from trees 10 feet off the ground or something, and then to take those cherries home and what do you do with them? Make pie? (laughs)²⁹

While Sr. Julie tries to awaken this connection with youth, Sr. Ginger, the chaplain at Larned State Mental Hospital and Penitentiary, brings nature to the broken of society as a means of healing. Sr. Ginger talked a lot about how many people grow up disconnected from nature, disconnected from love, deprived and depraved. In order to heal, people must reconnect with nature, and God, and love. The patients at the hospital work in a large garden and sell their produce to the community. The experiential connection to the land provides healing. Ginger, a jolly 85 year-old woman bursting with life, is committed to using nature as a means of reawakening and rehabilitating lost members of our society:

How do you connect people to the land without using Jesus? I just tell them to go out and watch that tree and I'll say, can you make a tree grow? I make them sit under the tree and the leaves and the sunshine and just talk about that.³⁰

Justice

The ethic of non-violence guides the community's environmental activism and extends to the care for creation. Sisters grew visibly upset relating stories of environmental degradation – or environmental violence – and the effects of these actions both to the earth and to the earth's inhabitants. Often these effects are several steps removed, as evidenced with Judy Stephens' explanation linking ethanol as an alternative energy source to wars in the Middle East:

I don't think you can consider that without thinking about the moral issue of war and what we're doing in the Middle East and how we're bombing people's homes and countries day after day after day after day for our national security to have our oil. To me, it's major. It's huge. I mean that's a big moral issue and what do you do about it?³¹

Carm Thibault, on the other hand, directly linked the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, and cluster bombs to the greatest error in human history – thinking that 'it won't happen to me' - to ecological destruction.

So we can close our eyes to it and not worry about it, it won't happen here . . . I think that's one of the great errors in human history is thinking that it won't happen here. Everybody thinks that, it won't happen to me, my family, it won't happen in my country. And I think very few people extend that to it won't happen to my earth. Which is probably what enables us to . . . when I think of the war and I think maybe one of the worst bombs is that cluster bomb, which goes way deep into the earth and explodes and I think the earth itself is weeping.³²

Several reflected on the consumer culture in the United States and the injustices present in the system, echoing economic justice statements from the Vatican, Bishops, and LCWR. Julie Christensen expressed frustration with consumer culture:

The way we use our dollar ultimately affects everyone it influences, which is global. While I was down there (El Paso) I did a lot of looking into the fair trade markets and what our consumption habits have done to the terrain in different places. Our coffee habit is the reason that most Central American countries can't feed themselves because we need to grow our coffee in their environment . . . and our need for ethanol has destroyed Brazil. You know . . . It's like all of these . . . it's like, Holy Mackerel, we've really . . . you know . . . (laughs). So, I can get very angry about some of those things.³³

Judy Stephens linked this to voluntary simplicity and the need to focus on individual actions:

I had a deep connection to the natural world and see how we are consuming the world. I've travelled a bit . . . worked quite a bit with people from Mexico and lived for quite a bit in Mexico and saw the difference in what we consume and what people in other countries, especially in the third world, how little they have and then the tendency . . . once they have access to money or to resources, (they) want to become like us and rightfully. Or to watch what's happening in China and Japan, it just feels like the future of the universe is to consume more and more and more . . . I don't think we realize the responsibility we have to be conservative and change ourselves.³⁴

Nearly every interview linked the community's ethic of non-violence to environmental problems. Several explained the broad understanding of non-violence as extending to all areas. Their all-encompassing definition of violence includes anything that denigrates the dignity of another. For instance, displacing villagers to build a sanitary landfill would qualify as violence as it denigrates the dignity of the people to have their homes destroyed and their ancestral lands turned to a dump. Recalling the earlier context, this thinking is very much in line with Vatican

statements on the environment. For example, Pope John Paul II urged that "modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life style. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause."³⁵ Sr. Regina Ann provides a summary of all these issues, linking consumption to war, to displacement, to environmental degradation to relationships:

If we continue to have to consume in order to have wars, which displaces people, ruins the water, ruins the earth, the soil and everything, we have to do something to bring about human beings being truly human again. We can't have good relationships if we're not as human as we can possibly be. We have to take care of ourselves first because we have to try to recognize what it means to have good relationships, to have right relations with everything. I know that's being very philosophical and heady, but it's from the heart, too.³⁶

Frustration

All of the women interviewed were selected to be a part of the project because of their environmental awareness. While the individuals interviewed expressed deep understandings of the interconnectedness of ecology, social justice and theology, not everyone held such sophisticated views. Of course, those women did not volunteer to be interviewed for their environmental activism but their voices were heard through the interviews, nonetheless. Presumably resulting from the ethic of non-violence, gossip about other sisters simply did not happen in my presence. However, one of the sisters related a story of how she deals with those who are not necessarily in the same place. She had met a priest from another country who prepared a meal for her. In the meal preparation, she noticed that he used all of the insides of the red pepper – seeds and all. Ever-mindful of waste, she took to this same method of preparation, incorporating the whole pepper into dishes. During one such meal, a fellow

sister was upset that she used all those parts that should have been thrown out. Instead of getting upset, the cook (the sister relating the story) continued her practices but did not make that particular soup again and the complaints never resurfaced. This story exemplifies the non-violent approach heard over and over in interviews. Instead of direct confrontation, even within their community, sisters chose to stand as a witness to the right behavior, took on additional tasks like washing out containers for the recycling to make up for the lack of interest in others. The sisters acknowledge that this can be frustrating but realize that not all are in the same place. As Bernadine Pachta related: “Not all people are at the same place. I think it’s grace. I think it’s something that God showed me somewhere along the line that this is our earth.”³⁷

While some might have been more critical of others less involved, the sisters are ultimately accepting of one another and willing to take on additional tasks to pick up where others are not. Again, this is evidence of their strong adherence to an ethic of non-violence. As Janet Lander assured me:

I have not found myself frustrated because I think people do what they can do. Part of living in community is seeing difference not as a problem, but as a richness. So, each person would be doing her best in each her own way is fine.” she later reflected, “the best counter to apathy is to by your own example to spark a new flame. So, rather than grumble, it’s much more productive to just redouble your efforts.”³⁸

Not enough

During my first visit with the sisters, I pushed them to detail the activities that they undertook both independently and as a group to live out this mission. This was a mistake for several reasons: 1) The sisters are a humble group of women. They are not the sort to “toot their own horns,” but rather will relate their successes in an incidental fashion. 2) The majority

of the sisters talked about the community as a whole and did not highlight their own particular contributions (see #1). 3) While this is an important mission for the sisters *it is just one of many*. At that initial visit, I wore a sweater because the air conditioning was quite cool, I noticed lights left on here and there and wondered, in my impatient way, why they weren't doing more? It was not until a later interview with Sr. Jeanette Wasinger that this seeming paradox was illuminated:

Most people are far more intelligent and into earth studies and "green." The Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters Monroe Michigan, they renovated their Motherhouse and went totally green. They invested tremendous financial resources into doing that. That is a commitment. I don't think we would go there. I don't think we want to put our resources there. It doesn't affect relationships. It affects the earth in a wonderful way, I'm sure, and it's a model It's more institutional. We are not institutional. We divested of our institutions: our college, our hospitals, everything but Manna House of Prayer and a piece of property in New Mexico. That's all the institutions we have. I think that's an institutional approach, and I think there's a great deal to say about that. It's a statement. If that's where you want to put your money, millions, probably . . . I don't think we would . . .

We'd say, what's the need out there? Where are the poor? Who needs this money? How can we get hands-on work with the poor? Or people who are in need. I don't even like talking about the poor these days because everyone is getting poor. Our resources are quite limited. I think we are using it in the way that is best with us.³⁹

If they have not "done enough" environmentally, it is not out of laziness or apathy, it is because they have so many worthy missions to fulfill that they can't put all of their energy into greening their facilities. Additionally, their stance of non-violence keeps them from "fighting" over issues internally. They pray on an issue, discuss it, pray some more, bring it up to the group, and, when the time is right, the concept is set in motion, as illustrated in *The State of the Heart and the Order of the House* discussed in Chapter 7. While the voice of impetuosity cries out to hurry up, this method has worked for the sisters for years, upholds their values of non-violence, strengthens their communities and ensures that all are behind the effort.

While sisters who grew up on farms and witnessed the advent of chemical usage would have had similar experiences, would have participated at least incidentally in the Year of Reconciliation with the Earth, and lived among women with advanced understandings of ecology, the fusion of horizons did not always lead to ecological awareness. One interviewee sadly recalled the day that community members received the Earth Journal. After the meeting, she found an Earth Journal, binder and all, thrown into a trash can.

One final example takes on a much bigger problem, that of violence against children and the loss of soul. The Sisters of St. Joseph nationally began to focus on raising awareness of human trafficking and the child sex trade in the U.S. Sr. Anna Marie Broxterman expressed the shock she felt when she realized that Wichita, Kansas, was a central hub for the global sex trade.

I'm hoping that getting in touch with creation will restore our spirituality to the US. I mean, I think we've lost our soul in some ways, when I think of the evil that people are perpetrating on one another. You know . . . where's that coming from? It is like a loss of soul . . . a loss of spirit We heard that the FBI says that Wichita KS is the fifth largest violator of human trafficking. We were told that it's because we are at the crossroads . . . So, it's a place for exchange of persons. So, I mean now that is alarming. So it touches me back into the loss of soul. You know, that who . . . who . . . if they really were aware of who they are . . . if they were aware of our interconnection, who could do that?⁴⁰

The sisters focus on care of the other in an ever-changing world. Sr. Anna Marie seamlessly shifted between the benefits of a connection with nature to the loss of soul evidenced by the human trafficking trade happening just a short drive from Concordia, to the interconnectedness of all which circles back to connection with creation, again, representing a seamless understanding of the complex interconnections among theology, justice and ecology, among other things.

Dear Neighbor

The sisters' business is with "dear neighbor" in whatever form that takes. While they have made efforts to increase the sustainability of their buildings and lifestyles, and they hope to increase these efforts, they are also putting tremendous amounts of energy into supporting women and children in their community via the new "neighbor to neighbor" initiative and into building strong and sustainable communities through the Neighborhood Initiatives Program, while continuing to support and stand in solidarity with their sisters in Brazil, working for rights of immigrants on the border and educating themselves on the problems of our time like human trafficking. They are busy women. They see all of these issues – and more – as inherently connected to the call to care for creation.

A main goal of the sisters of St. Joseph is to remain relevant to the present time. They seek to fill needs as they arise through societal changes. The environmental actions are a drop in the bucket of the larger work of these energetic women. The actions of the sisters started with the most basic commitment to "reduce, reuse, recycle" and extended through concepts of organic gardening, proper food consumption, energy reduction, and eco-justice. The sisters do what they can, where they are. As Sr. Carm put it,

In the end, you have to start with yourself and move up the ladder . . . and it's nothing that's going to change fast. If you look for results . . . you're going to be despondent all the time. Don't forget that you are part of a whole, you are not alone, you are part of something much bigger than yourself and if you can remember that then you will want to treat everyone like you want to treat yourself. And that really goes back to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.⁴¹

The Sisters of Saint Joseph have no intention of disappearing if there is still a need to fill. Their charism calls for a love of "dear neighbor" which they expand to include all of creation. They consistently look for the need in their communities that is not being filled and do what

they are able to fill that space. Cheryl Lyn Higgins, the lay administrator of the community's Neighborhood Initiatives, commented,

What has impressed me about the sisters is the fact that you're never too old and nothing is beyond the realm of possibility if they decide they want to do something, they get it done first; they don't do it just half way. . . . They have always been open to something new to go into, if it has merit, if it fits within their mission, they embrace it eagerly and they pursue it with energy and every resource they have, they don't shy away.⁴²

They are innovating, re-evaluating and evolving to maintain relevance in modern-day society. They vow to continue their work until all of the needs are filled.

Hope for the Future

Each interview ended with the questions, "If you had the opportunity to impart wisdom to a young person whose actions could change the world, what would you say?" or more simply, "What do you hope to see in the future?" The answers varied widely. Sr. Ginger Pearl focused less on *what* she would say and more on the conditions that would most effectively support the imparting of wisdom:

First of all we would need to be where there is beauty. It might be a creek. It might be under a cottonwood tree. It might be camping out and watching the moon. It would have to be somewhere where I could feel the drinking in of the wisdom. Not just the wisdom of today, but drinking in the wisdom of our ancestors, from the moment of the beginning. See, you talk about cosmos . . . the beginnings. When we know how the beginnings began and it's all because of God's energy that this keeps expanding . . . We're strangers if that isn't our teacher.⁴³

Sr. Betty Suther, the champion of the community garden, focused on more practical things:

I'm going to go back to the idea of the community garden because we learn that we're going to care for one another and you're going to care for the earth. So the two things go together. I think with the community garden, people have learned to work together and get to know one another through that process. It's all part of caring for our neighbors.⁴⁴

She would like to see more of the grounds transition to community gardens to further this mission. Additionally, she hoped that the community would be able to implement more renewable energy. She tempered her hopes with an oft-repeated patience, "I'm the kind of person who doesn't think a long way into the future. I'm a present-moment person and so I always say, make the best of the present moment and things will unfold as we go through and if you do it, do it well."⁴⁵ Judy Stephens picked up on the theme of renewable energy and listed a variety of hopes for the future.

I would hope to see the United States less dependent on coal for electricity, I would hope to see hybrid cars and electrical cars, I would hope to see the Midwest covered with wind turbines. I would hope to see a different kind of grass in our front yard and animals in the backyard and everything in our salad bar mostly from our garden. We're taking steps in all those directions but we're not there yet. I would hope to see a hundred new nuns here, young nuns.⁴⁶

Sr. Janet Lander blended the two questions into one response:

Do everything you can to increase your relationship with every part of creation that you come in contact with. Don't be afraid to be different. Follow your conscience. Follow your heart. What gives me hope for the future is that I think the consciousness is increasing and I am really hopeful that humanity is not too far from a turning. Some of the writers today talk about the great turning. I know that some of humanity will turn if they turn because of crisis rather than out of good will, but if that's what it takes, then that's what it takes. So, I'm hopeful that the turning is near.⁴⁷

Regina Ann's wisdom reflected on relationships, non-violence, and domination:

Don't think you have to control everything and subdue it. Partner with it and form a relationship with it. And then you come to an understanding of what it means to respect. Forming a relationship with everything rather than thinking you have to dominate or rule the circumstance. Because after all the only being one can change is one self.⁴⁸

¹ David A. Gruenewald, "Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious

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- Education." *American Educational Research Journal* 40 no.3 (2003):621.
- ² Marcia Allen, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on July 8, 2011.
- ³ Virginia (Ginger) Pearl, CSJ, 2011.
- ⁴ Regina Ann Brummel, CSJ, Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview with Rachel Myslivy on August 4, 2011.
- ⁵ Janet Lander, CSJ, 2011.
- ⁶ Regina Ann Brummel, CSJ, 2011.
- ⁷ Sr. Carm's memory of using DDT to kill weeds is best understood as a recollection of the onset of chemical usage on the farm, as DDT is a pesticide, not an herbicide.
- ⁸ Carm Thibault, CSJ, 2011.
- ⁹ Mick Smith, *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory*, (New York: SUNY, 2001), 205.
- ¹⁰ Judy Stephens, CSJ, 2011.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Gadamer, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience," 335.
- ¹³ The Earth Lovers Committee and resulting Earth Journal were discussed in detail in Chapter 6.
- ¹⁴ Patricia McClennon, CSJ, Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview with Rachel Myslivy on August 5, 2011.
- ¹⁵ Carolyn Teter, 2011.
- ¹⁶ Will W. Adams, "The Primacy of Interrelating: Practicing Ecological Psychology with Buber, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty." *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 38 no.1 (2007):27.
- ¹⁷ Jeanette Wasinger, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," Rachel Myslivy on August 5, 2011.
- ¹⁸ Father Jean Pierre Medaille, SJ. *Eucharistic Letter*, (1660) paragraphs 21, 22.
- ¹⁹ Carm Thibault, 2011.
- ²⁰ Gadamer, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience," 334.
- ²¹ Stephens, 2011.
- ²² Betty Suther, CSJ "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on July 7, 2011.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Judy Stephens, personal conversation with author during Assembly Days, June 7, 2013.
- ²⁶ Stephens, 2011.
- ²⁷ Anna Marie Broxterman, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," Rachel Myslivy on August 5, 2011.
- ²⁸ Lander, 2011.
- ²⁹ Julie Christensen, CSJ, "Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview," with Rachel Myslivy on August 5, 2011.
- ³⁰ Pearl, 2011.
- ³¹ Stephens, 2011.
- ³² Thibault, 2011.
- ³³ Christensen, 2011.
- ³⁴ Stephens, 2011.
- ³⁵ John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation."
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html
- ³⁶ Brummel, 2011.
- ³⁷ Pacht 2011.
- ³⁸ Lander, 2011.
- ³⁹ Wasinger, 2011.
- ⁴⁰ Anna Marie Broxterman, 2011.
- ⁴¹ Carm Thibault, 2011.
- ⁴² Cheryl Lyn Higgins Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interview with Rachel Myslivy on July 9, 2011.
- ⁴³ Pearl, 2011.
- ⁴⁴ Suther, 2011.
- ⁴⁵ Suther, 2011.
- ⁴⁶ Stephens, 2011.
- ⁴⁷ Lander, 2011.
- ⁴⁸ Brummel, 2011.

Chapter 10: Reflections

The scope of the Catholic response to the environmental crisis as presented on macro and micro levels can be overwhelming to process. Doctrinal statements don't always move individuals and organizational missives sometimes miss the mark. However, presenting the multiple layers of influence and activities help to ground the concepts in reality. Two final issues will be addressed in this section: Criticisms of the movement and the future of sisters in America.

Criticisms

While the Vatican encourages awareness of ecology and frames environmental activism as a justice issue, it is not on the radar of most American Catholics. Further, American Catholics are an extremely diverse bunch ranging the full socio-political spectrum. Indeed, many in the United States still criticize environmental actions. In the increasingly conservative political climate of Kansas, climate change is often denied and sustainability initiatives attacked.¹ Some argue that viewing nature as a primary source of revelation is not in accord with Catholic teaching. Viewing environmental issues in terms of the economy, many are unwilling to undertake the self-sacrifice urged by the Vatican and are hesitant to reject consumer culture which ultimately harms the environment, regardless of strong statements from the Vatican urging such actions. It is worth noting here, as well, that the tone and goals of the Vatican change with each new pontiff, as the recent transition from Pope Benedict to Pope Francis demonstrates. Claims of "nature worship" offer an easy excuse not to engage in environmental work. Some critics consider Thomas Berry a "new age guru" promoting "new age heresy."

Similarly, critics disparagingly refer to sisters engaged in environmental activism as “pagan sisters” or “pantheistic sisters”.²

Conflicts over allegiance to hierarchy vs. allegiance to mission continue to the present. Recent criticisms accuse sisters of “radical feminism,” adopting a post-Christian stance, and not adequately addressing priorities of the hierarchy. In 2011, when the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Interviews were taking place, the Apostolic Visitation – essentially a Vatican sanctioned check-up on communities – was underway. Sr. Bernadine Pachta responded:

We as religious sisters need to proceed as we are proceeding, whether it's with the apostolic visitation or the things against women religious. We need to proceed to the best of our ability. We have minds, we are as important as anybody else out there. Whether we are women or whether it is men. We have a message. And we do not sit back and let somebody else tell us how to act. We operate from what we see is for God, for the whole kingdom, for the whole earth.³

In April of 2012, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith announced that the LCWR would be placed under investigation under the authority of Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain with a five-year mandate to reform. The Doctrinal Assessment accused the LCWR of many things, including “moving beyond the church, or even beyond Jesus,” ministry to homosexual persons, radical feminism, and an inadequate focus on abortion and euthanasia.⁴

Sr. Pat Farrell, then-president of the LCWR, discussed the Vatican criticisms on NPR’s Fresh Air,

I would say the mandate is more critical of positions we haven't taken than those we have taken. As I read that document, the concern is the issues we tend to be more silent about when the bishops are speaking out very clearly about some things. There are issues about which we think there's a need for a genuine dialogue, and there doesn't seem to be a climate of that in the church right now.⁵

Cardinal Timothy Dolan responded, “they’ve had statements on ecology and climate change, militarization of space, nuclear weapons — but nothing on the issue of abortion and the

importance of upholding the right to life.”⁶ The “reform” by the Vatican is frequently portrayed as a “crackdown” on the sisters. As John Allen, Jr., Senior Vatican Correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, quipped:

*The story has become a cause célèbre, primarily because of the deep fault lines it seems to encapsulate: men vs. women, family values vs. women's issues (especially in a domestic political season in which an alleged "war on women" is in the air), Rome vs. America, left vs. right, authority vs. dissent, the hierarchy vs. the grassroots, and so on. Depending on where one stands vis-à-vis those divides, it's easy to see LCWR as either a hero or a scapegoat.*⁷

Sisters affirm that the call of Vatican II led them to engage in broader ministries; they embrace a seamless garment of social justice and not single-issue activism. Sister Simone Campbell, head of NETWORK, a social justice organization founded in 1971 by sisters following the spirit of Vatican II, has been a popular voice in the fray. Campbell helped organize the Nuns on the Bus tour, met with President Obama, and held her own on the *Colbert Report*. In another NPR interview, she referred to the investigation as “a sock in the stomach,” stressing that realities for sisters in daily, active ministry with the poor are quite different from the Vatican experience.

*The fact is that our lives are committed through these vows to living the gospel and while we have amazing richness in the spiritual life, we give up a lot to do this. And it's not about the giving up but it's about the fidelity to the call to be faithful to the Gospel and have that so unseen and to have this edict never mention the Gospel, never mention the responsibility to be God's arms and hands with people who are poor and suffering, the people at the fringes, people who suffer injustice, to have that not at all seen is extremely painful.*⁸

She clearly expressed frustration with the process: “It’s painfully obvious that the leadership of the church is not used to having educated women form thoughtful opinions and engage in dialogue,”⁹

As previous chapters detailed, Vatican II called women religious to be in active ministry with the people, responding to the needs of the times. Many see the current investigation as running counter to the spirit of Vatican II, resulting from the increasingly conservative church politics. Sister Maureen Fielder laid out those connections clearly in a CNN Interview:

But what's really at stake here in larger significance of this is the future of the church. Whether we're going to go back to the old church before the Second Vatican Council, which was male and dictatorial and not collaborative, obsessed with issues of sexuality, or whether we're going to go forward with what Second Vatican Council called us to, which was collaborative leadership and dialogue and a church where the laity really have a place -- and a place where social justice issues are in the forefront of the agenda that we're carrying forward.¹⁰

Allen continues, "This is not just about the Vatican vs. the nuns." It's about "what it means to be Catholic in the 21st century."¹¹ 2012 marked 50 years since the Second Vatican Conference convened. The Vatican encouraged parishes to study Vatican II documents and fully participate in the renewals; the outcome of recent calls for renewal could dramatically change the face of the Catholic presence in the U.S. Further, the election of Pope Francis has certainly changed expectations. While he committed to continue the investigation of the American sisters, many remain hopeful that things will change under his leadership. Considering his dramatic departures from the status quo of Vatican life, it is hard to say what directions he will take the Church.

The Future

While communities of women religious across the United States are highly engaged, influential in politics, engaging in worldwide missions, working for peace and justice globally and increasingly engaging in new missions, the number of sisters in the United States is much

diminished from the heyday of the 1960's. In 2012, there were only 54,018 women religious with a median age of those represented by the LCWR at 74.

Table 2: Number of Vowed Women Religious in the United States¹²

Number of Religious Sisters in the United States							
	1965	1975	1985	1995	2000	2005	2012
Religious sisters	179,954	135,225	115,386	90,809	79,814	68,634	54,018

Sr. Bette Moslander recalled the dramatic shift that occurred as these numbers began to decline:

Given the pace of change right after Vatican II, many of the young women just sort of discovered that they didn't really have a vocation. What they really wanted was the freedom of Vatican II but they just left the congregation. Asked to be dispensed of their vows. I have a friend out in California who was appointed postulant mistress – that's the people who train the first training of people after making vows – she said, 'I was appointed postulant mistress in, let's say, 1977 and I had 40 postulants, the next year I was postulant mistress and we had 20, the next year there were ten and the year after that there were none and I was fired.' Some of those larger communities on the east coast might have had as many as 100 novices. Our congregation which never had more than 600 members would have 100 members, so that kind of shift has gone on. In Kansas, it's probably about the national norm.¹³

Fewer women choose to enter the religious life while those who remained after Vatican II are elderly. The drop in numbers in recent years is more a result of death than departure. The Vatican does not support communities of women religious financially and many are ineligible for social security, which causes an increasing struggle to care for aging members. New members are few and far between and the older generations of sisters are passing; many point to the end of religious life in the United States.

Congregations are consolidating nationwide to share resources and strengthen dwindling communities. Many communities have divested themselves of their properties and are consolidating their congregations, creating large orders with regional and national

representation. In Kansas, for example, the Dominican Sisters of Peace consolidated seven communities into one regional organization spanning several states, while the Adorers of the Blood of Christ consolidated three communities to form the United States branch of the global community. The global networks of women religious enable women from developing countries to come to the United States and still live in community while receiving education and training.

While numbers have obviously declined, and some point to the end of sisters in the United States, others feel that they are in a time of transition and that they are evolving. There is no denying that the number of women taking vows has dwindled and that presence of women religious is simply not as strong as it was back in the heyday of religious life in the United States. However, the high number of sisters in the 50's and 60's are anomalous to religious life historically, which was always considered a counter-cultural lifestyle and not a popular choice in mainstream culture. Sr. Regina Ann reflected:

I think we are in a transition stage right now; I think the whole church is. And there needs to be a lot of reexamination. Vatican II was the beginning of that and I think for some folks they might think it might be going underground and we need to live the whole idea that we are at the heart of the church and we are open to the world to see what are the signs of the times you know. We need to keep breathing the signs of the times. People need to be as human as they can possibly be. And I think if we can keep that spirituality among us and talk to people there will be people who will join us in greater numbers again. We know we have associates, we have the new form of membership, the agrégée movement. This will continue to grow. We are so close to it right now, we can't really see how that is going to happen. But I am sure it will continue to grow. It will change and it will grow and it will be something new. As I said, conflict is neither negative or positive. Different attitudes and ideas shape a new reality if they are transformed together. So I think there is a great future; we don't know what it will be yet.¹⁴

Still, some communities are experiencing a renewal of religious life. The Sisters of St. Joseph point to an increase in membership. Sr. Annie commented, "people that say we are dead. I don't believe it. I don't think that. I think we are coming close, really close, to having

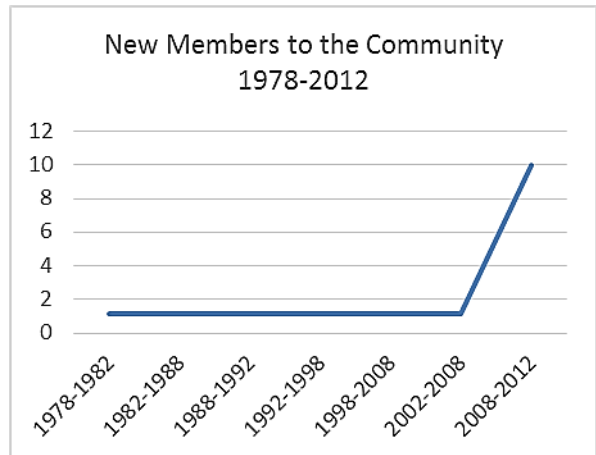
young people like Julie (Christensen) coming into our community. I really believe this with my whole heart. I really believe this. I think it's coming."¹⁵ While there are no longer groups of 15 or 20 women joining every year, in the thirty years after Vatican II there were often no new members. In recent years, new faces are appearing in the form of agrégées and associates. While canonical sisters take three public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, agrégée sisters take one single vow, that of fidelity to the community. Associates are lay men and women who commit themselves yearly to live the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The agrégée program appeals to women, often previously married, who have obligations and cannot join the community in the traditional way. The single vow of fidelity to the community opens membership up to these women. The agrégée program is rooted in the early years of the congregation in France and the Concordia community has seen exciting growth in this area.

Sr. Marcia Allen explains,

*You know we have two people a year making profession, now that's nothing to sneeze at. There were years when nobody did . . . and these people are middle aged but they're still vibrant, committed, dedicated and totally involved so it's not like nothing is happening. When you have a lot of very elderly people and a lot of your members are great-grandmothers of course you are going to have people dying. On the other hand there is another younger group of people; it's like the generation that is missing is being filled in by these agrégées which I think is just interesting.*¹⁶

Community records show that in the thirty years spanning 1978-2008, only seven members joined that remain with the community today. Since 2008, ten women have joined, two more joined in June of 2013, and six are in candidacy. This growth is represented by the graph, "New Members to the Community: 1978-2012. The seven new members between 1978

and 2008 were averaged out across that time in five year increments (1.16 new members per five years). The five year increment between 2008 and 2012 reflects the following actual data: 2008 (1), 2009 (1), 2010 (3), 2011 (2), 2012 (3). As of June 2013, there were 130



Sisters associated with the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia serving in the United States and Brazil.

The Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, stay away from the “d” words – “diminishing,” “declining,” etc. Instead they look to a dramatic increase in numbers that shows a real possibility for growth. Marcia Allen relates, “the persons making vows are strong and steady and that means life for us.”¹⁷ The community is evolving and on the upswing as a vibrant, thriving, and inspiring community.

Conclusions

What the future of Catholic Sisters in the United States look like is anyone’s guess. Still, the sisters persevere. Sisters respond to the needs of Earth; the ecological activism is just one part of a seamless garment of social justice. When American society needed caretakers for abandoned children, nurses to bandage the injuries of wars, and teachers for hordes of immigrant children, sisters built orphanages, hospitals and schools, and set to work. As the changes of Vatican II took shape in women’s communities, many found themselves free to engage in larger societal movements. Responding to the call of social justice, sisters protested the Vietnam war, marched for Civil rights, provided sanctuary from the wars in Central America,

nursed dying AIDS patients, exposed human trafficking, domestic violence, illiteracy, chemical dependency . . . the list of causes is extensive. They heed the call to care for the poor, the earth, and all of creation. As the realities of the ecological crisis become more pressing, sisters have become increasingly involved in environmental activism. The destruction of the earth through pollution, environmental degradation, and massive species extinction calls sisters to stand with the earth, advocating for natural resource conservation, access to clean water, clean air and a low-impact lifestyle. While these realities lead many to direct, confrontational activism, the sisters interviewed reflect a strong commitment to ethics of non-violence, embracing supportive education, outreach, and standing as witness, as effective models of activism. The organizational structure of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious ensures input from all levels of religious life, thus incorporating emerging social justice issues into the national agenda. The consistent integration of ecological issues with modern social justice issues is apparent in the community's *Resolutions to Action*. These national priorities are reflected in the actions of communities but are equally shaped by the individual communities as well. The stories of individual sisters in a rural Kansas town reflect a sophisticated awareness of the complex interconnections of the causes and implications of ecological problems. The stories detail the growth that ultimately led to collective action, education, and awareness into what can be seen as a seamless garment of eco-justice. The Sisters of Saint Joseph in Concordia, Kansas, exemplify their charism to care for all of creation as "dear neighbor" in a way that preserves the dignity of all life, upholds Catholic teaching, and ultimately presents a model of activism that bridges faith and environmentalism philosophically but also offers numerous examples of practical activism.

¹ In 2013, the Kansas House saw two problematic bills for environmental concerns: KS House Bill No. 2366, which would make it illegal to use “public funds to promote or implement sustainable development,” (referred to the Committee on Energy and the Environment) while HB 2306 would present science surrounding climate change as “controversial” and require teachers to present arguments against the impact of human actions on global temperature changes (referred to the Committee on Education).

² Gardiner, Anne Barbeau, “Our Pantheistic Sisters, February 2008. *New Oxford Book Reviews*
<http://www.newoxfordreview.org/reviews.jsp?did=0208-gardiner>.

³ Pachta, 2011.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, (Vatican, 2012)* accessed May 24, 2013.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20120418_assessment-lcwr_en.html

⁵ Sr. Pat Farrell, OSF. “An American Nun Responds to Vatican Criticism.” *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio, July 17, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/2012/07/17/156858223/an-american-nun-responds-to-vatican-condemnation>

⁶ Timothy Dolan, “Bishop Explains Vatican’s Criticism of U.S. Nuns.” *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio, July 25, 2012 <http://m.npr.org/news/U.S./157356092>.

⁷ John L. Allen, *Notes on the LCWR Overhaul*. National Catholic Reporter, April 27, 2012.
<http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/notes-lcwr-overhaul>.

⁸ Sr. Simone Campbell: Vatican Reprimand 'Like A Sock In The Stomach,'" *The Two Way*, April 19, 2012, accessed June 9, 2013. “<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/04/19/150986066/sister-simone-campbell-vatican-reprimand-like-a-sock-in-the-stomach>

⁹ Elizabeth Tenety, “Vatican Report US Catholic Sisters Hold Serious Theological Errors. *Washington Post*, April 18, 2012. Accessed June 9, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/under-god/post/vatican-report-us-catholic-sisters-nuns-hold-serious-theological-errors/2012/04/18/gIQAWSarRT_blog.html

¹⁰ Sr. Maureen Fielder, SL. “CNN Interview with Carol Costello,” May 29, 2012, accessed June 9, 2013. <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1205/29/cnr.01.html>

¹¹ Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Catholic nuns group and Vatican remain at odds.” *USA Today*, June 13, 2012.

¹² Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate n.d.

¹³ Moslander, 2011.

¹⁴ Brummel, 2011.

¹⁵ Glatter, 2011.

¹⁶ Marcia Allen, CSJ, Personal correspondence with author, November 23, 2011.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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Appendix 1: Selected Timeline shaping the Catholic Response to the Ecological Crisis	
1923	Formation of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and the beginnings of the Biodynamic Farming Movement circa 1930-1960
1933	Catholic Worker Movement begins, continues to present day
1948	Donora, PA – 20 people die and over 600 hospitalized from sulfur dioxide air pollution Federal Water Pollution Control Act established
1953	170-260 people die from lung conditions exacerbated by heavy smog
1954	Brown v. Board of Education deems segregation in public schools unconstitutional Sister Formation Conference Established
1955	Teilhard de Chardin dies; The Phenomenon of Man published in French (1959 in English) Rosa Parks, Montgomery bus boycott
1956	Conference of Major Superiors of Women Founded
1957	Vietnam War Begins
1960	Divine Milieu published (Teilhard) (posthumously) FDA approves Birth Control Student sit-ins and non-violent protests begin throughout the south
1962	John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic president elected to office Vatican <i>monitum</i> (reprimand) that Teilhard’s writings were dangerous to youth
1962	Silent Spring published (Rachel Carson) Vatican II Convened
1963	Clean Air Act passes Betty Friedan publishes the Feminist Mystique Congress passes the Equal Pay act Kennedy assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr’s “I have a Dream” Speech in the March on Washington
1964	Women invited to attend the third session of the Vatican Council Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on race, color, religion, or national origin.
1965	IHM Conflict with Cardinal McIntyre Malcolm X Murdered, Watts Race Riots, Affirmative Action Vatican II concludes
1967	Lyndon Johnson establishes policy to end gender-based discrimination The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis Lynn White Thesis emerges
1968	Apollo 8 sends first photographs of Earth from space. Back to the Land Movement Cuyahoga River bursts into flames reaching over five stories high from chemical pollution Martin Luther King Assassinated
1970	First Earth Day
1971	Leadership Conference of Women Religious Formed (restructured from Conference of Major Superiors). Consortium Perfectae Caritatis established in opposition to LCWR, favoring allegiance to hierarchy
1972	DDT Banned
1973	Endangered Species Act Roe v. Wade legalizes abortion
1975	Vietnam War Ends
1978	Love Canal Disaster exposed.
1979	LCWR President publically challenges Pope John Paul II to include women in all ministries Pope John Paul declared St. Francis the Patron Saint of those who promote ecology Three Mile Island Nuclear Power plant meltdown

Appendix 2: Resolutions to Action (summaries taken directly from The Costs of Hydrofracking (May, 2012)

How could you allow the earth to be destroyed for some money? And you told me that it did not really matter because at the end of time, according to your faith, Jesus Christ would return and make the world whole again for his faithful, and those people who did the damage to the world would receive their just due. But don't you see that 'those people' are you? 'Those people' are all of us if we allow the destruction of our earth. –Stephen Cleghorne (May 18, 2012)

Sex-Trafficking in the Hotel Industry

Four and a half years ago, the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph came to Nix Conference & Meeting Management to research the hotel site for their conference. They asked about the hotel's policy on human trafficking. We were not aware at the time that hotels were the venue for this crime. Together with the sisters, we worked to generate conversation with the Millennium Hotel St. Louis to sign the ECPAT-USA (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) Code of Conduct.

We Are the 99% - The Occupy Movement (Spring 2012)

8th Day Center for Justice has worked on economic issues since its founding in 1974. We have witnessed the ongoing struggles of communities made poor to claim a space in a cultural imagination and political discourse that is not shaped by the misconception that poverty is a choice.

The current discourse on poverty in the United States is shaped by the financial downturn that erupted in 2008. However our experience has shown us that many different communities locally and globally were struggling long before the "meltdown."

Economic Justice Advocacy Critically Needed (Oct. 2011, Volume 20, Number 3)

Economic Justice Advocacy Critically Needed: NETWORK continues to assert that the budget is a moral document and that the spending and revenue outlined therein reflect our nation's values. Women religious strongly support the "preferential option for the poor" and are, therefore, advocating to ensure that the budget preserves the social safety net so essential to those most in need. . .

Civility in Discourse: A Franciscan Approach (December 2011)

On January 10, 2011, a former Franciscan Action Network (FAN) colleague and I presented a workshop on Civility in Discourse to student leaders at Neumann University, a Franciscan institution sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. The training incorporated role-play exercises from the Pace e Bene organization and illustrative stories from St. Francis of Assisi's life.

US Muslims and Interfaith Dialogue (July 2011, Vol. 20, No. 2)

I was raised in a small town in Arizona that at the time had a very small Muslim population. At the time there was not an Islamic center and our Friday prayers, Sunday schools, Eid prayers, and breaking fast together during the holy month of Ramadan were conducted on a rotating schedule in a few homes of our family friends. Later on, as the Muslim American community grew, we would host the community in a hall located inside a church that was gracious to lend us their space.

Immigration Enforcement and Family Separation (Jan. 2011, Vol. 20, No. 1)

In 1998, my husband and I were arrested by immigration enforcement officials. My three kids who were 13, 15, and 18 at the time, were left alone. Not knowing anyone, they had to stay by themselves and pretend that their parents were at home in order to avoid being separated and being placed in foster homes. They had to survive without Mom and Dad.

Global Seed-Stories of Hope (Oct. 2010, Vol. 19, No. 4)

In September 2000, leaders from around the world gathered at the United Nations to adopt eight Millennium Development Goals for education, poverty, food security, health, gender equality, HIV/AIDS, the environment, and partnerships, to be achieved by 2015. Catholic sisters around the world, already addressing many of these issues, were drawn to be more strategic in their efforts to contribute to this global movement.

Legalized Homicide: Death Penalty 2010 (Aug. 2010, Vol. 19, No. 3)

He waits like a child for what others are about to do him — as in his powerless childhood. Sam is buckled down, covered with a white sheet, arms outstretched and strapped down, ironically resembling Jesus nailed to the cross. In his arm, a needle awaits the flow of the chemicals that will end his life. . .

Reducing and Offsetting Our Carbon Footprint (May 2010, Vol. 19, No. 2)

The 2009 LCWR Assembly Resolution calls us to measure and reduce our carbon footprints. The Global Concerns Committee, which had proposed the resolution, agreed to calculate our personal footprints by going to one of the suggested web sites and discussing the results at our fall meeting. . .

'ILLth': Uneconomic Growth (Feb. 2010, Vol. 19, No. 1)

Many have compared today's economic crisis to the Great Depression. Indeed, with official unemployment surpassing 10 percent and debts forcing a growing number of families to leave their homes, it is easy to see similarities. Both financial crises were rooted in a prior period when the financial sector of our economy became too large and influential, putting the rest of the economy at great risk.

Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time - Part 1 (Oct. 2009, Vol. 18, No. 4)

From the perspective of deep time, we see our unity with everything that has come before us. We can see the significant patterns which have guided the natural world, from its humble beginnings in single cells, through its increasing complexification into the beautiful community of ecosystems, by which Earth continues the elaboration of life expressions as a single living being. All the relationships by which these patterns of life have developed are remembered in the exquisite strands of DNA wrapped within the vessel of every living cell in the totality of Earth's being.

Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time - Part 1 (Jul. 2009, Vol. 18, No. 3)

Carbon-offsets, ecological footprint, peak oil, global climate change, habitat loss, levels of toxicity . . . the list goes on and on. How are we to respond to these new dimensions of an ethical imperative which is core to the life of a vowed religious attempting to give witness to the presence of God in history?

Earth's Call: Reduce Our Footprint (Apr. 2009, Vol. 18, No. 2)

Elise Garcia, OP writes, "Like other informed people, I have been aware of global warming for some time. Seeing *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006 raised my level of concern. But the matter moved to the backburner, again, as the unconscionable war in Iraq, the horrors of Darfur, and other pressing issues grabbed my attention. It wasn't until 2007, a month after I made first profession as an Adrian Dominican Sister, that I awakened to the magnitude of the problem.

Climate Change and Hunger (Jan. 2009, Vol. 18, No. 1)

For I was hungry . . ." Many speak of hunger. Who are the hungry? Around the world desperate cries of hunger resound. "With higher food prices now, we eat only once a day." "We had hoped the rains would improve, but the animals died and food is scarce." "Often it is leaves, shrubs, and mud cakes for the children."

Clean Energy — A Tricky Business with Possibilities (Oct. 2008, Vol. 17, No. 3)

Is your response denial, despair or hope when you pay \$4 a gallon for gas, see food costs continue to rise, and daily hear of the uncertain, fluctuating economy? In the United States all are tied to increased energy needs that historically have been dependent on cheap, readily available fossil fuels. Transportation uses 37% of our energy while production of electricity requires 40% more to sustain our lifestyle. We are, in fact, only one-fifth of the world's human population but use 23% of the global energy diet (World Population Organization).

Cherish Earth's Wetlands (Jul 2008, Vol. 17, No. 3)

Katrina. The word makes me shudder, makes my heart race in fear and rage. I don't remember a lot about the hurricane that day . . . just fear, confusion, and hopelessness. After reaching safety through the love and compassion of so many friends and strangers, rage began to consume me as I learned of the horrendous toll on human lives and God's creation, some of which could have been prevented. There are many questions we hadn't seriously considered before then. I hope we do now.

US Impact on Global Economic Justice Through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching (Apr. 2008, Vol. 17, No. 2)

The presidential election campaigns are focused mainly on domestic issues such as the state of the economy, the housing crisis, and healthcare reform. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and global climate change are on the public radar screen, but unfortunately, few of the many other key global economic justice issues are.

2008 Elections: From 'YOYO' to 'WITT' Economics (Jan. 2008, Vol 17, No. 1)

Domestic economic justice is essentially a vision and a mission for all people of good will who are concerned for the common good. Our experience reflects the reality that there is widespread economic insecurity in the United States.

Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk (Oct. 2007, Vol. 16, No. 4)

Many say that climate change is already impacting the poor in the United States and around the world. Darfur? A prolonged drought in the 80s and 90s forced shepherds and farmers to move into neighboring tribal lands. Katrina? While scientists are divided about whether or not climate change is producing stronger cyclones, such events are more likely because of climate change.

Sabbath Year: The Opportunity and the Call (Jul. 2007, Vol. 16, No. 3)

Because of debt cancellation agreed to by world leaders in 1999 and 2005

- An additional 300,000 children in Burundi enrolled in school
- Zambia hired 4500 new teachers and fees for rural healthcare were abolished
- Children have three extra years of school in Honduras
- In Mozambique, there are funds to vaccinate children against tetanus, whooping cough, and diphtheria.

Inter-Religious Dialogue for Peace (Apr. 2007, Vol. 16, No. 2)

I have just read A Mighty Heart, Mariane Pearl's book about Daniel Pearl's murder by terrorists in Pakistan. It occurs to me that my education did not provide enough information about Pakistan, about Muslim distress over the division of Hindus and Muslims in 1945, and certainly not enough knowledge of the conflict over Kashmir. This is only one area that I feel I should know more about to be a responsibly informed adult in our multi-cultural world.

TORTURE (Feb. 2007, Vol. 16, No. 1)

The Mayan man said, "We did not want to be like them." That is what he said about why he did not fight back when the army came to get him. The Mayan people of Guatemala suffered greatly during the 36-year civil war ending in 1996. Many were tortured, disappeared, or killed. This reality exists in many countries where there is war or where other forms of domination squelch human rights. The torture that happened in Guatemala still happens in the world today.

Development and Migration: Empowerment of Women on the Move (Nov. 2006, Vol. 15, No. 4)

In just the past month, we have heard the stories of migrant women from all over the world. Mandesa from Nigeria attempted to enter Spain on a boat to the Canary Islands. Juana from Mexico works as a nurse with elderly patients in Los Angeles. Asian mafi a traffi cked Sunitha from Sri Lanka to Australia. An Albanian sells his sister to a man migrating to Italy. . .

Immigration: Welcoming the Stranger Today (Jul. 2006, Vol. 15, No. 3)

The phenomena of migration and immigration present complex problems to both our international and national communities. They affect nations of origin (for example, the exodus of medical personnel from the Philippines), of transit (the multiplication of refugee camps in Kenya for Sudanese citizens), and of destination (reflected in the current US debate about the "strangers" among us).

Opposition to the Death Penalty (Apr. 2006, Vol. 15, No. 2)

It is March 1, 2006. We write from Detroit, Michigan on the 159th anniversary of the state of Michigan becoming the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish the death penalty. This first official act of Michigan's legislature resulted because the state had witnessed the public executions of a mistaken perpetrator and the misapplication of "justice" in the case of a mentally incompetent criminal. . .

Racism (Jan. 2006, Vol. 15, No. 2)

Racism is systemic and permeates virtually every US institution – judicial, political, social, medical/healthcare, education, labor, small and large businesses, the professions, sports teams, the arts, and the church. Reflection on racism indicates a mixed message of progression and regression over the years. . .

Privatization of Water (Jun. 2005, Vol. 14, No. 3)

More than a billion people in the world lack access to clean water. More than two billion do not have adequate sanitation. Pollution, waste, depletion and a rapidly growing human population are contributing to a global water crisis. On our present path, by 2025, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will experience serious or severe water shortages. Whole eco-systems, dependent on water, will suffer devastating effects. . .

Gospel Nonviolence in a Violent World (Apr. 2005, Vol. 14, No. 2)

Each day we experience violence of all kinds: bombings and other terrorism, a pre-emptive war policy, a national budget that tramples the poor, murders by school children, domestic violence, diseases that could be avoided, trafficking of women and children. Is nonviolence possible? If not us -- who? If not now, when?

Millennium Development Goals: The Promise of a Better World (Feb. 2005, Vol. 14, No. 1)

In 2000, 189 countries of the world signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration. This was an historic moment and set forth an ambitious agenda for improving the lives of the world's poorest

citizens by 2015 through a joint effort of developing and developed nations. The MDGs are a set of measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger and disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

Earth Charter: Incorporate the Principles of the Earth Charter Into Your Justice Agenda (Dec. 2004, Vol. 13, No. 4)

Throughout the past decade congregations have begun to participate in the marvelous story of our universe with new understandings. We have, with the new knowledge brought forth by scientists, environmentalists and theologians, become much more aware of our relationship with Earth. We are part of Earth, not apart from it. We have come to understand and believe in our interconnectedness as a human family with all of creation. This new understanding has helped us to use a new lens when we look at our world.

Wal-Mart: Our Concerns and Response (Jun. 2004, Vol. 14, No. 3)

Wal-Mart operates more than 4,400 discount stores throughout the United States. The company reported sales of \$256 billion and employed 1.4 million people in fiscal 2003. The mega-corporation is the largest employer in the world. If it were an independent nation, it would be China's eighth-largest trading partner. In its efforts to become the world's largest retailer, the company has encountered many criticisms for its human rights violations, racial and gender discrimination, and its disregard for workers, among many other issues.

Striving for Fair Trade Opposition to Unjust Trade Agreements (Mar. 2004, Vol. 13, No. 2)

The FTAA is essentially an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into Central America, South America and the Caribbean. NAFTA, a trade agreement between Canada, Mexico and the United States, took effect in 1994 and has devastating effects on working families and the environment. In the United States where many of our sisters serve in parishes, schools, hospitals, clinics, social services, etc. they have seen thousands of people lose their jobs because the factories have moved to Mexico or another country where labor is cheaper.

Reverencing the Earth (Jan. 2004, Vol. 13, No. 1)

"Sacred is the call, awesome indeed the entrustment. Tending the holy. Tending the holy." How do we continue to move beyond these lyrics to a change in our patterns of action? The August 2003 LCWR national assembly grounded us in the reality of the sacred enterprise in which we exist not as dominators of creation but as participants in a cosmic story. Does our participation reverence the earth or is it characterized by an addictive over-consumption, which depletes Earth's non-renewable resources?

Trafficking of Women and Children (Oct. 2003, Vol. 12, No. 3)

In May 2001 the members of the International Union of Superiors General declared their commitment to address the "trafficking of women which has become a lucrative multi-national business." At their joint national assembly in August 2001, LCWR and CMSM passed a resolution calling members to oppose the trafficking of women and children and educate others regarding the magnitude, causes and consequence of this abuse.

Continuing to work toward Jubilee: The World Bank Bonds Boycott (Jul 2003, Vol. 12, No. 2)

At the August 1998 Joint Assembly, a resolution on World Debt was approved by the members of LCWR and CMSM. The resolution challenged conference members to participate in the global movement to

cancel impoverished countries' debt in a variety of ways. Several congregations joined the Jubilee 2000 campaign and encouraged their members to advocate for the passage of U.S. debt relief legislation.

Power: Inside and Outside (Mar. 2003, Vol. 12, No. 1)

Practices and policies that promote poverty, racism and violence seem to engulf us. We see our President and his advisors careening toward military action. We see people suffering from failures in our welfare system. We see new and smarter forms of racism afoot in our country. In response, we make phone calls, send faxes and e-mails, endorse statements, and engage in public protest. We engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of those who suffer oppression.

Appendix 3: Interviews

Sisters interviewed for the Green Sisters in Rural Kansas Project (INCOMPLETE)

Name	Ministry
Allen, Marcia	President of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas; Adjunct staff member of Manna House of Prayer; Director of Agregee Education
Broxterman, Anna Marie	Leadership Council member and Member of Vocation and Global Consciousness Committees
Brummel, Regina Ann	Academic Dean and Development Director for White Earth Tribal Community College; Mahanomen, MN
Christensen, Julie	Staff member of Manna House of Prayer; in charge of youth ministry
Glatter, Anne Vincent	Retired Gardener; volunteers in vegetable and fruit preparation
Lander, Janet	Staff member of Manna House of Prayer; member of Vocation, Global Consciousness, and Associates Committees
McLennon, Patricia (Pat)	Founder and co-director of Neighbor to Neighbor – a center for women and women with children
Moslander, Bette	Staff member of Manna House of Prayer; private retreat director
Pachta, Bernadine	Archivist for Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas
Pearl, Virginia (Ginger)	Chaplain at Larned Correctional Mental Health Facility; Larned KS
Stephens, Judy	Member of Leadership Council; member of Energy Conservation Committee and liaison with Mt. Joseph in Concordia
Suther, Betty	Director of Manna House of Prayer; director of Community Gardens and director of Novitiate
Thibault, Carmela	Pastoral Minister for shut-ins and hospitals for the Catholic Diocese in Salina, KS
Teter, Carolyn	Adjunct staff member for Manna House Spiritual Direction and Workshop presenter
Wasinger, Jeanette	Ministers to those who seek her spiritual direction and companionship via email and phone

Laypeople interviewed	
Higgins, Cheryl Lyn	Administrator of Neighborhood Initiatives
Mitchell, Stephen	Gardener
Thrash, Cecelia	helps organize Community Garden of Hope
Malone, Siara	Volunteer
Potts, Cindy	Volunteer
Jones, Kate	Volunteer

Appendix 4: Evaluation Results

**Green Sisters in Kansas
Sisters of St. Joseph, Concordia, KS
Oral History Project
Evaluation**

Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses	Average Rating
1. I feel that the questions asked were appropriate.	9	3				12	4.8
2. I was able to explain myself clearly.	5	5	2			12	4.3
3. I felt comfortable during the interview.	9	3				12	4.8
4. The interview was conducted in a professional manner.	11	1				12	4.9

Comments on Ratings:

1. Excellent
2. OK
 Couldn't always find my words!
 I felt "foggy" today.
3. Mikes make me a little nervous!
 Rachel was smooth.
 Good
4. Strongly agree

Is there anything you particularly liked about this interview?

- Rachel makes one feel comfortable.
- I liked the interviewer's commitment to the topic and her obvious concern about knowing my opinion.
- The questions were engaging.
- The focus on the environment was interesting . . . it gave me the opportunity to reflect on the questions as they relate to our mission and ministry. It felt like a life-review in a different context!

- Rachel’s questions were profound and thought provoking. She listened well, and helped me pursue topics deeper when needed. And I appreciated that.
- Yes, the personal-ness of Rachel – she asks such good questions and right to the point.
- I enjoyed Rachel’s own ease and openness . . . felt comfortable.
- Interviewer was easy to talk to.
- The manner in which one thing flowed into another.
- The subject (CSJ’s)
- I liked the fact that a young wife, mother, homemaker, gardener so professionally is taking her time and life to share the message of our precious mother, Earth.
- Yes, I liked the framing of the questions which included a life-experience context. It was comfortable to give personal and communal historical information as a context or backdrop for the conversation regarding “Green . . .”

Is there anything you wish would have been done differently in this interview?

- I appreciated everything about it, and I felt inspired as I left. I appreciated Rachel’s style of interviewing and I felt prepared to speak freely. The introduction was helpful. I think some of the original impetus for this project and process was lost when (staff) left the Motherhouse. She was the original contact person, as I understand. But nothing has been lost for the project with this change. It does require some explanation and my computer did not allow the information (other staff) sent to open. But, no problem as far as the interview went. Rachel filled in the blanks for me. I do hope for written information about the project, as I appreciate it so much.
- No (2)
- I would have been more comfortable without taping, or at least it would have been good to know this was included at the time of the original request.
- While I loved the spontaneity of the interview, I wasn’t always able to adequately recall in that moment all I might have said if I had prepared. On the other hand, a “prepared presentation” would not have worked well, either!
- No, I think Rachel does a good job of it.
- Remind me – 2 hours/ thought it was one! 😊
- I would have liked to have known the questions in advance so that I could have had the resources I needed to name at hand; also could have primed my memory. As it was I felt that my responses were vague and inadequate.
- Not really.
- If there could be connections or batteries, I would have preferred being in the garden or pagoda.

Are there any topics that should have been covered but were not? If so, please explain.

- I think the key to the success of this project of interviews is the way Rachel opens the life of the person so that important issues can be included. I expanded on my life-experience time and again, and I think it added to my memory of the experiences of “caring for the earth.” For me “green” is part of life in nature and relationships. It is

integrated into our life. However, I feel the need to be more serious about my own actions and those of our Congregation. Perhaps we need to become more conscious TOGETHER once again. However, I think we are all quite committed to the effort to live with, protect, and nurture Mother Earth. She is our DEAREST NEIGHBOR. I know that there are many women in the Congregation and myriads in society, who do it so much more intentionally than I do.

- No, I think we fully covered most everything and there's another time to catch loose ends.
- Each person will bring in new topics – can't cover all
- Not from my perspective – I chose the most important first – I could have told many more stories.
- No
- No – it felt very complete.
- I can't think of any.(2)

Do you have any suggestions to improve future interviews?

- I'd have to look up a bible quote!
- The interview was very fine.
- I question the use of Sisters' names. Usually research protects anonymity.
- I was not sure what this interview was about before I got there. Maybe a little (short) note about its focus and purpose would be nice.
- Thank you - I appreciated the time and your presence during the interview.
- None. Was a very good experience! And I am grateful, very grateful for this opportunity and for the work Rachel is doing on behalf of the future of the planet, the animals, and human generations to come.
- Not at all.
- Perhaps a little blurb re: you and re your work – purpose – ex. (Harvard project)? Will there be a written piece? Or only oral? Ie. End result . . . (your email)
- Good job! Thank you!
- I would have liked to have had information beforehand regarding nature of interview.
- When possible have something natural, even through a window or a flower.
- Rachel, your wisdom and maturity and relational skills shine in this work. As I said, I am delighted with this approach, for it gives people you interview an opportunity to integrate life by talking about it and putting it together sequentially. I hope you continue to let this unfold in yourself and in the project. You have my best wishes and my prayer.