

CHARITY EARTH NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, September 27, 2016

Welcome to the second issue of the Charity Earth Network (CEN) Newsletter. Little did we suspect that when we profiled Sr. Paula Gonzalez, SC in the first issue that she would have been received into the embrace of Boundless Charity by the second issue. We dedicate this issue to Paula and include some remembrances of her by the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. May the example of her life inspire the entire Company of Charity to “hazard yet forward” in bold and creative ways of living in harmony with Earth.

This issue coincides with the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul. Terry Moran offers a reflection, “The Company of Charity Embraces the Community of Earth: Vincentian Spirituality through and Ecological Lens,” and also an ecospirituality prayer service that can be used on or around the feast of St. Vincent. As a creative example of promoting “Earth-Charity in Action,” we share the “Green Spot” program designed by Debbie Weber, Director of the Office of Peace, Justice and Care for Creation of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. Please share the experiences of your Congregations for future issues of the CEN Newsletter pjei@scnj.org.



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

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

-sharing information and resources

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

Remembering Paula Gonzalez, SC



“I first met Paula when I was a freshman at the College of Mount St. Joseph; she was the leader of a book discussion group I was part of. I honestly don’t remember a single book we discussed, but I certainly remember Paula - her enthusiasm, her way of drawing out a bunch of 18-year-olds to think deeper about issues. Throughout the 50 years since then, so many Sisters from other communities have said to me, when they found out what congregation I was from, ‘Oh, that is S. Paula Gonzalez’s community!’ followed by some comment about a time when she spoke to them and how impressed they were with her. Truly a prophet in our midst! I am sure she and St. Francis and Mother Margaret George and all the saints who loved nature are rejoicing with Jesus - who also paid attention to the lilies of the field...” ~ S. Pat

“The last time I was with Paula was a few years ago. My brother and I rode with her all around the Motherhouse grounds in the solar golf cart. Zero to 25 in just a few seconds it seemed. Hanging with Paula meant ‘hanging on.’ Sister enjoyed such a wonderful ride on this big blue planet she loved so much.”
~ Associate Donata Glassmeyer

“In these past few years Paula presented several sessions with our novices and also in the intercommunity novitiate program. She created each of the sessions anew. I was struck by the way Paula wove spirituality into the sessions. I was blessed to eat with Paula and others in the dining room just a few days before she fell. I remember thinking how engaged she still was with all dimensions of life. I will surely miss Paula’s presence and inspiration. I sense I – and others – will think of her

frequently in our own awareness of Earth. Paula gave and inspired so much. May she experience rich blessing with the fullness of God!”
~ S. Donna Steffen

“What I know for certain, I am not the only person on whom Paula Gonzalez made an impression! I am confident that, world wide, people will remember some prophetic word they heard from the many talks she gave. What’s more, true to the Charity charism, she loved all of creation from the air that surrounds us to those that took breath.” ~ Associate Vicki Welsh

“My last encounter with Paula occurred not long ago, during the short window of time after she had moved back home and before she broke her hip. I stopped her and Mary as they were pulling out of the driveway to tell Paula how happy I was to see her back on the compound. She said her recovery had been a struggle, but she was so happy to be home. I gave her an encouraging ‘Si, se puede!’ - (Yes, it can be done!) - a motto that Paula lived by. In response, she thrust her bony fist into the air and exclaimed ‘Se puede!’ Paula, it could be done, and you did it, Sister. Your work and your legacy will live on with the next generation. There will not be a day that the sun rises which we will not think of you, our Sister of the Sun. May you rest in the light of God - the Mother of all renewable energies.” ~ S. Annie Klapheke

“When I was studying for my doctorate in multicultural education, Paula said to me, ‘Remember, Cj, that the cultures of the world include more than the human.’ I have never forgotten that and thank her for reminding

me about the interdependence of all of creation. I will certainly miss her physical presence but know that she will always have a presence in my life and in the lives of all those she touched. Dance with the stars, Paula!”

~ S. Caroljean Willie

“I am remembering a piece Paula wrote about composting and the Paschal Mystery and I am imagining her JOY at now knowing fully the Universe Story. And, of course, she would choose a green burial! Through all these wonderful sharings don’t we know how she continues to live in us who carry on her legacy of care for Earth, her passion for the Mystery that infuses and energizes all of creation? Keep stirring us up, Paula!”

~ S. Janet Gildea

““I first met Paula about 20 years ago, during my first visit to the Motherhouse. We (participants in a program) had the wonderful experience of spending time at EarthConnection, which Paula founded. She was very proud of the fact it was only dependent on alternative energy and that it was environmentally sustainable, not emitting anything harmful to the ecosphere. She was so vibrant and full of so much energy, one couldn’t help feeling inspired in her presence. She was light years ahead of her time in her recognition of the need to preserve our Earth, treating it with care. She was passionate about ecology and preached her message to all, long before it became popular to do so. Paula seemed to radiate a light of love and warmth and it was a pleasure to be in her company. From that time on, each time I visited the Motherhouse, I would seek her out, to have that sense of relationship. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Associates, and always voiced her support. Paula was such a gift to my life, and I will forever be grateful for having known her. I know she’s with God, and taking a major role in looking out for our Earth, recruiting others to join her in this important project!”

~ Associate Lee Hemminger

“What a remarkable and lovely person! Whenever my visits to the Motherhouse overlapped with the day bacon was served for breakfast, Paula would be there and invite me to eat with her. She said she loved bacon and could not miss those breakfasts. I would be entertained with all kinds of information on world climate and environment news. I even heard quite a bit about her childhood and how she entered the Community. She was a gift to us and to the Church for her vision and her prophetic stand on the environment. I will miss those bacon-breakfasts and her enthusiasm for all of God’s bounty. Can you imagine what she is enjoying in the Great Cosmos of Heaven? Go for it, Paula...”

~ S. Mary Ann Flannery

“I first ‘met’ Paula when she gave a talk in 1971 to what then was the Dayton Region. I immediately became immersed in her presentation which included Earth, future, change ... It was challenging, exciting, reflective. I knew I wanted to meet and know this amazing SC. Later we became friends as she was building EarthConnection and I would stop by to see the progress and listen to Paula’s explanations of the alternative energies involved. We shared the similarities of promoting Earth and women and saw the potential for ‘building bridges’ which we did through group discussions and presentations. What a gift she was to us and much of the world! I loved Paula’s ongoing enthusiasm, her constant calling us to do more and her exceptional knowledge as a scientist, teacher, prophet. I’m happy for her that she was able to live long enough to see some of her vision realized. Believing that our planet, Earth, was Eucharist, Paula’s joy is surely infinite! I, like many, will miss her presence among us.”

~ S. Louise Akers

A tribute to Paula from the *National Catholic Reporter* can be found at this link

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/charity-sr-paula-gonzalez-solar-nun-remembered-environmentalists-force-nature>

*“Our times require that all of us appreciate
our part in this great work of co-creation.”*

~ Paula Gonzalez, SC



THE COMPANY OF CHARITY EMBRACES THE COMMUNITY OF EARTH: VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY THROUGH AN ECOLOGICAL LENS

From the beginning, the charism of Charity has been characterized not so much by a spirituality or style of prayer but rather by efficacious response to human need. St. Vincent de Paul did not begin with theological reflection or writing a Rule. In August 1617, as he was preparing for Sunday mass, Vincent received word of an entire family in the parish of Châtillon reduced to destitution. His appeal for the family in his sermon drew a great response in food and supplies from the people. This experience let him to create structures to meet on-going needs– the first Confraternity of Charity, a collaborative effort between Vincent and women of the parish that would eventually give birth to a number of religious communities in the Company of Charity.

Perhaps you’ve read or seen the recent book by climate change activist Bill McKibben. Its title is *Eaarth*. McKibben intentionally adds the extra “a” to reinforce the central thesis of his book– Earth as we once knew it no longer exists. We now live on “eaarth” a planet whose life systems have been damaged beyond the point of no return by the activities of fossil fuel burning humans. There is no going back. Vincent responded with efficacious compassion to the news of the destitute of Châtillon. How does the Vincentian family respond with efficacious compassion to the news of the perilous decline of our home planet and its life systems? Most of us are not climate scientists, nor researchers into new sources of sustainable energy; what can we possibly do? What is the role of the Company of Charity in what Thomas Berry has famously called “the Great Work” of our time?

A few years ago cosmologist Brian Swimme gave the keynote address at the annual conference of Spiritual Directors International in Vancouver. Against a background of slides of swirling galaxies

millions of light years wide, Swimme brought home a cosmological truth. He said that the prime crisis of our civilization is not scientific or technological. Scientific information on climate change is clear and widely accessible. The problem is that the information is not entering human consciousness. When the information reaches the human spirit it is blocked by one of the central stories of post-industrial civilization– that Earth is a thing that we use rather than a sacred community of life to which we belong. The most pressing task of our time is not invention of technologies but the transformation of consciousness. Relatively few of us are scientists or engineers– but we are experts in the sacred task of transformation of consciousness.

Vincent invited us to bring the poor out of invisibility, to see the poor not as an annoyance but as a presence of Jesus. Does he invite us now to see Earth not as a collection of objects that we own but rather a community of life to which we belong? In its long history, the members of the Vincentian family have issued countless invitations to transformation of consciousness– in regard to those made poor, the economic and cultural structures of society, the dignity and autonomy of women. How does this tradition encourage us to respond to the need for the one of the greatest

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transformations of consciousness in human history?

Many of the groups in the Vincentian family in recent years have made a commitment to probe the relationship between eco-spirituality and Vincentian-Setonian spirituality. Someone once compared religious truth to a Buddhist meditation bell. Just as the bell only releases the sound inside it when struck by a mallet, so a religious truth releases its deep meaning only when it is struck by the needs of the world. Our new evolutionary, ecological consciousness can strike the bell of our faith tradition and our charism and bring sounds out of them that we perhaps have never heard before. The Trinity, a central doctrine of the Christian faith, seems to most believers to be a hopeless abstraction with little relevance to daily life. But how the symbol of the Trinity sings again when struck by the scientific truth that relationship is central to reality. All that exists shares a common origin and a common destiny with everything else that exists. Mutual relationship is at the very heart of the Holy Three and is mirrored in creation that is the overflow of the divine heart and an icon of the divine identity. The American poet Emily Dickinson invites us to re-imagine the sign of the cross by praying, "In the name of the bee and of the butterfly and of the breeze. Amen." Every time we make the sign of the cross we are proclaiming our relationship not only to the Triune God of our Christian faith, but in and through that profession of faith, to everything that exists from the smallest subatomic particle to the most massive distant galaxy. We are a universe of kin, held and sustained by a God who is a community of passionate and creative love.

What richness is added to the doctrine of the Incarnation, the God who takes flesh, when we realize that the hydrogen atoms in the body of Jesus of Nazareth were born in the first moments of the universe's existence; that the other elements were birthed in the explosion of a star. The flesh-taking of God was in process from the first moments of creation!

Our sacramental tradition reminds us that God's self is expressed and touched in the stuff of this Earth. Creation is not in competition with God but the principal way in which God is experienced. Abuse of creation is truly a sacrilege- the violation of a sacred thing. By our unsustainable life style we commit the gravest liturgical abuse imaginable- we compromise the cleanliness of water, the pureness of wheat, grapes, olives; we pollute the air from which we draw breath to praise God in word and song. Our actions to preserve creation are not merely trendy or politically correct, they are liturgical. Does it make any sense to bring solemnity to our acts

of worship and not bring a sense of liturgical awe to our dealings with the whole of creation? Pope Benedict XVI, whom some have called the "green Pope," made this same point in a Vespers homily in July 2009: "The liturgy [is not] something alongside the reality of the world, but the world itself shall become a living host, a liturgy. This is also the great vision of Teilhard de Chardin: in the end we shall achieve a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host."

Eucharist is at the heart of Elizabeth Seton's charism and it was primarily the Eucharist that drew her to the Catholic Church. She was shocked when she heard a British tourist in an Italian church mock the Eucharist and she reflected, "My very heart trembled with shame and sorrow for his unfeeling interruption of their sacred adoration. I thought secretly on the words of St. Paul with tears, 'They discern not the Lord's body!'" Imagine Elizabeth looking with tears at the destruction that human selfishness has brought to God's creation. Do we discern God's presence in God's first word-creation?

How might the traditional five virtues of Vincentian spirituality ring anew from the perspective of ecospirituality? Vincent called simplicity "my gospel." For him simplicity was the focus of our intention on God alone. Simplicity invites us to have the largest perspective possible. Ecospirituality invites us to always consider the well being of the whole. As Thomas Berry challenges us, "All human activities, professions, programs, and institutions must henceforth be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human/Earth relationship." Simplicity calls us to see the universe as God sees it- one interdependent sacred community.

Humility means living in the truth. We humans have not lived in the truth of our place in the community of life. We are called to live in a way that recognizes we are not above creation or separate from it.

Vincentian meekness calls us to an attitude of deep respect and welcome of the other- not just the human other but all of creation. Each creature is a word of God, an irreplaceable icon of the divine beauty. The ants that ruin our picnic also aerate the soil under our feet and make agriculture possible. Even the ants invite contemplation. Vincent saw mortification not as empty ascetical gestures but as the necessary dying to anything in ourselves that prevents us from generous service of the poor. How much of the life-style that we in developed countries consider "normal" is in reality bought on the back of

the poor. Do we calculate the price that the poor pay, that Earth itself pays in our lifestyle choices?

“If love is the sun then zeal is its ray,” said Vincent. He very appropriately looked to the source of energy in our solar system as his image for zeal. Can the Company of Charity embrace the ecological crisis of our time with the same energy and creativity that Vincent brought to the relief of the poor in 17th century France? Vincent called his five virtues “the five smooth stones by which we might conquer the evil Goliath,” (*Common Rules XII, 12.*) Perhaps they show the Company of Charity the way forward in facing our Goliath– climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, contamination of natural resources.

Vincent said, “Let us love God, let us love God but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow.” The following are some suggestions of how to translate eco-spirituality into eco-action:

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

Live closer to the rhythms of nature– Vincent said that the love of a Daughter of Charity should be both tender and effective. We are moved to action only by what widens our heart with affection and compassion. Fall in love with your own backyard! Learn that spring is coming not from the weather person on TV but from seeing the tips of tree branches swelling with new life. Learn where your water comes from and where the food in your local supermarket is grown. Make friends with local organic farmers and support them. This also means reverencing the limits of our human nature as well and our need for rest, healthy meals, contemplative time– is there truth to the old joke that there are contemplative religious, active religious and, Sisters of Charity– hyper-active religious?

Advocate: The coordinators of justice, peace and the integrity of creation of the Congregations in the Sisters of Charity Federation are currently discussing ways in which we can use our corporate voice to draw attention to climate change and its effects on the

lives of the poor. The first to suffer are poor women and children the traditional focus of the ministries of the Company of Charity. Can each of us thing of a way to bring the issue to the table of the various groups to which we belong– in our parishes, with our families and friends, with our governments? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Include the well being of Earth frequently among the intercessions at Mass. Do an earth audit of your house, ministry, parish– what are concrete steps that you can take to live and work more sustainably...and probably save money in the process?

Among the many consciousness changing tools available, the following are particularly powerful:

Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium.

This is a powerful and engaging seminar consisting of videos, group exercises and discussions which gathers people around three goals: to bring forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet. www.awakeningthedreamer.org

The “Transition Community” Movement.

This social movement is founded on the idea that climate change can be addressed not just at the national and international levels but also by local communities. Its primary focus is not campaigning against things, but rather on creating positive, empowering possibilities and opportunities. www.transitionnetwork.org

Perhaps the most valuable tool for a change of consciousness is a prayerful and reflective study of Pope Francis’s extraordinary encyclical *Laudato Si’*. A particular strength of the encyclical is the link Pope Francis makes between ecological degradation and those made poor. The Company of Charity cannot help but find in *Laudato Si’* profound insights into its deep story and compelling motives to actions. The Charity of Christ, incarnate in Earth, compels us!



Fr. Terrence J. Moran is the Director of the Office of Peace, Justice and Ecological Integrity of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, NJ.

EARTH-CHARITY IN ACTION

PRACTICAL WAYS OF LOVING EARTH...



EarthConnection, OPJCC and the Spirituality Center present the **Green Spot Initiative** in honor of our Sisters and staff, who demonstrate their love and concern for our Earth.

A **Green Spot** is a Motherhouse or Mother Margaret Hall office, department, work area or a Sister's living area that practices at least three "acts of green." These "green" areas will receive a **Green Spot** certificate to proudly display.

Becoming a **Green Spot** area is as simple as one, two, three!

- 1) Fill out a Checklist Form and check off at least three things you do to make your space "green."
 - a) [CLICK HERE](#) for a department, office or work area form
 - b) [CLICK HERE](#) for a MH or MMH Sisters' living area form
- 2) Return the form to OPJCC.
- 3) Proudly display your **Green Spot** certificate.

The **Green Spot Initiative** will continue throughout the year. You may pick up a Checklist Form from EarthConnection, OPJCC or the Spirituality Center. Return it to OPJCC and you will receive your **Green Spot** certificate.



► Thanks to the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet for this great resource [Download a sign](#) to put on your desk or table to remind you to consider the impact of your actions on the Earth community. The sign says, "How does this decision/action impact the Earth community?"

► Visit the Website of **EarthConnection**, a ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, a center for learning and reflection about living lightly on Earth. <http://www.scearthconnection.org/>



Vincentian Virtues and the Healing of Earth

Environment: A picture of Vincent and a lighted candle. 5 small stones for each participant. These can be gathered outside or Michael's/other craft stores sell bags of smooth stones and small drawstring bags to keep them in. Choose participants to do the five reading.)

Opening Song: Maker of Galaxies (tune: Praise to the Lord the Almighty)

1. Maker of galaxies, stardust, and all that has being,
Open the eyes of our hearts to know faith's way of seeing.
Shine through the night; lead us to radiance of light,
vision empow'ring and freeing.
2. Jesus, of Mary born, bringing the good news astounding,
Open the ears of our hearts to your Gospel resounding.
Hearing your voice, let all the people rejoice,
glad in your blessings abounding.
3. Spirit of Jesus and mentor of saints through the ages,
Open our lips with a word that invites and engages.
We will proclaim pardon and peace in Christ's name
through all of life, all its stages.
4. We are your fam'ly beloved in each generation,
Church on a pilgrimage, called to embrace transformation.
Called to this way, growing in love day by day,
we live now, Christ's new creation.
5. Praise for the joy of believing and journey amazing;
praise for the goodness and beauty here, ev'rywhere blazing!
Praise for the song, singing the faint-hearted strong;
praise for delight in the praising!

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Commissioned for the Year of Faith by the Catholic Diocese of Dallas

Tune: LOBE DEN HERREN, 1414.4.7.8 (Praise to the Lord, the Almighty)

Leader: Next year we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism – the gift of the Spirit to the church and the world that inspires what we do and unites us to the other members of the Vincentian family around the world. On this feast of Vincent, we pray especially that his spirit might energize us to efficacious charity toward our wounded Earth. Vincent's virtues are energies of the cosmos calling us to live in harmony with the entire Earth community.

Readings:

1. Vincent called **simplicity** “my gospel.” For him simplicity was the focus of our intention on God alone. Simplicity invites us to have the largest perspective possible. As Thomas Berry challenges us, “All human activities, professions, programs, and institutions must henceforth be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human/Earth relationship.” Simplicity calls us to see the universe as God sees it – one interdependent sacred community.
2. **Humility** means living in the truth. We humans have not lived in the truth of our place in the community of life. We are called to live in a way that recognizes we are not above creation or separate from it.
3. Vincentian **meekness** calls us to an attitude of deep respect and welcome of the other – not just the human other but all of creation. Each creature is a word of God, an irreplaceable icon of the divine beauty. The ants that ruin our picnic also aerate the soil under our feet and make agriculture possible. Even the ants invite contemplation.
4. Vincent saw **mortification** not as empty ascetical gestures but as the necessary dying to anything in ourselves that prevents us from generous service of the poor. How much of the life-style that we in developed countries consider “normal” is, in reality, bought on the back of the poor. Do we calculate the price that those made poor pay, that Earth itself pays in our lifestyle choices?
5. “If love is the sun then **zeal** is its ray,” said Vincent. He very appropriately looked to the source of energy in our solar system as his image for zeal. Can the company of Charity embrace the ecological crisis of our time with the same energy and creativity that Vincent brought to the relief of the poor in 17th century France?

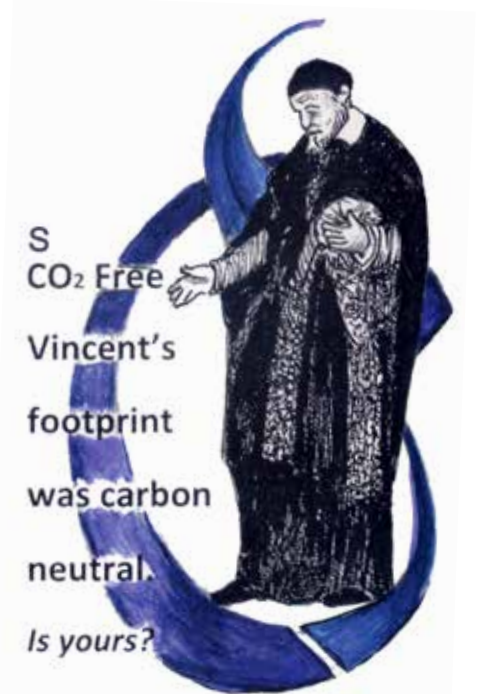
Reflection and Sharing

Which Vincentian virtue especially “fires” you at this time as you contemplate climate change/global warming?

Leader: Vincent called his five virtues “the five smooth stones by which we might conquer the evil Goliath,” (*Common Rules* XII, 12.) Perhaps they show the Company of Charity the way forward in facing our Goliath – climate crisis, loss of bio-diversity, contamination of natural resources. I invite you to take these five smooth stones to remind you of the energy of the charism of charity.

Closing Prayer

All: Saint Vincent de Paul, you saw the face of Jesus in those broken and made poor. With your courage and zeal, may we heal our broken earth. Mother Seton, you delighted in nature, radiant with God’s presence. Give us discernment to see God’s presence in Earth. God of Boundless Charity, you call us to live simply, to live sustainably, and to live in solidarity with those made poor. Help us to respond to that invitation with conviction and generosity. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus, child of God, child of Earth, Boundless Charity made flesh. Amen.



Drawing of St. Vincent by Sister Anne Haarer, SC (Saint Elizabeth)



The Charity Earth Network Newsletter is published three times a year – January, 4, April 22, September 27. Editors: Carol De Angelo, SC, Fr. Terrence Moran, Caroljean Willie, SC. Layout: Donna Sartor, Director of Communications, Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth.