

A Covenant of Peace  
with Earth:  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace  
Land Ethic



Painting by Julie Codd, CSJP

## **CSJP Land Ethic: A Covenant of Peace with Earth**

"On that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land. And will make them lie down in safety."

*Hosea 2:20*

Our Land Ethic, as an expression of the CSJP charism in terms of our desired relationship with the Land, calls us to a Covenant of Peace with Earth. This Land Ethic articulates a process of learning sustainable ways of Earth/human relationship that has been on-going in the Congregation for many years. Through the Land Ethic, we commit ourselves to continue and deepen this relationship. Our Land Ethic gives expression to our desire to enlarge the boundaries of community to include soil, rocks, air, water, plants and animals.

Our Land Ethic has two parts: Five foundational principles and a series of questions that will help us to put the foundational principles into practice in our homes and ministries.



# Foundational Principles

## 1. Earth Is Sacred

Faithful to the joyful proclamation of the book of Genesis (1:31), “God looked over everything made; it was so good, so very good,” we believe: “Earth is a revelation of God and the sustainer of all life. We recognize that the exploitation of Earth’s air, water, soil and species is a sacrilege.”

*Acts of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, p. 18.*

We affirm the sacredness of creation and we resolve to live in relationship with the land. We are called to contemplative action for the flourishing of Earth, to living mindfully in the present moment. The sacredness of creation also inspires the ways in which we care for our bodies.

## 2. Land Has Its Own Intrinsic Value

“Ecosystems...have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself.” *Laudato Si’, 140*

For too long we have thought of land as a commodity whose value is determined by its usefulness to humans. Our decision-making now must put the sustainability of ecosystems before financial profit.

## 3. Earth Is Endangered by Human Activity

“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.” *Laudato Si’, 2*

Ecological sustainability is one of the most urgent religious and moral challenges of our time. This challenge calls us to conversion of heart and change in behavior as individuals and community. These changes may involve significant risk and personal cost to us.



#### **4. Care of Creation, Justice for the Poor and Peace Are Inseparably Connected**

“In her own time, Margaret Anna Cusack (Mother Clare) made the connection between the devastation of earth and the victims of famine...Recognizing the interdependence of all life, we count among those who are poor all Earth’s creatures whose lives are threatened or diminished.”

*Acts of the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, p. 18*

We have a tradition of a special love for people made poor by unjust systems. We now expand that tradition to embrace the poor of all ecosystems. Therefore we make decisions based on their impact for the whole community of life, especially the weakest and most marginalized. The consequences of environmental degradation cause instability among people and fuel violent conflicts. Care of creation is an essential element of peacemaking.

#### **5. Intergenerational Justice**

“The ancient forests have been hewn down with little profit to the spoiler and to the injury in many ways of the native...The country which was in ‘God’s keeping’ then has but little improved since it came into the keeping of man.”

*Mother Clare, The History of Ireland, Acts of the 21st General Chapter, p 18*

We commit ourselves to intergenerational justice – to include in our decision making the needs of future human generations and the future integrity of Earth. This guides us in challenging structures and practices which are detrimental to Earth and in promoting sustainability.

## **Practical Questions for Implementing the CSJP Land Ethic: A Covenant of Peace with Earth**

### **Spirituality**

How do we consciously cultivate a relationship with Earth and bring an attitude of contemplative listening to Earth?

How do we deepen our understanding of our interdependence with all of creation?

Do we include the needs of all of Earth and not just human needs in our prayer?

Do we pray in gratitude for the countless ways in which Earth supports us and in which the beauty of Earth inspires us?

Are we conscious of the ecological implications of the materials we use in worship, e.g. natural beeswax candles, real flowers or plants, wine that is local and organic, avoiding unnecessary printed handouts.

### **Purchases**

How is environmental cost as well as financial cost considered in purchase of a product?

Do we research purchases to ensure: good stewardship of the Congregation's financial resources; just wages and decent working conditions for workers; environmental impact of the manufacturing, use and eventual disposal of the product?

What is the product made of? (Plastic from petroleum? Wood from clear cut forests?)

Where did it come from? (Carbon emissions in transport? Slave labor?)

How much packaging is involved?

How long will the product last, and is it recyclable?

## **Food and Housekeeping**

Do we consider important questions such as:

Where was this food grown?

Who grew it? Who picked it?

How much processing was required to grow it and bring it to this market?

Can we buy seasonal food from local organic sources?

Can we reduce meat consumption since meat production contributes heavily to the use of fossil fuels and the destruction of large tracts of land?

How can we reduce/eliminate use of toxic substances often contained in fertilizers, pesticides and cleaning products?

## **Energy and Water**

What practices do we employ to conserve water and energy?

How do our transportation habits contribute to or reduce carbon emissions?

How are we reducing the amount of water used to maintain lawns and gardens?

What habits and practices are we developing to avoid bottled water?

Are we adopting more sustainable, clean, renewable sources of energy for our homes, institutions and ministries?

## **Advocacy and Education**

How do we stay informed on issues of ecological sustainability?

How do we support policies, elected representatives and legislation that protect the well being of Earth?

With whom do we collaborate in protecting Earth?

Organizations? Individuals? Movements?

Do we renew regularly the ecological criteria for our corporate investments and use our power as investors to promote the flourishing of Earth?

Are we divesting from fossil fuel industries and investing in sustainable energy?

## Sustainability in Ministries and Sponsored Institutions

Do we do a regular sustainability audit and set regular, measurable goals to measure increasing commitment to sustainable practices?

How do our strategic plans reflect commitment to the preservation of the landscape; soil, rocks, water, air and species of the land?

How is environmental cost as well as financial cost considered in making decisions?

How do we facilitate ongoing environmental sensitivity, education and action in our institutions and ministries?

In choosing service providers, how do we assess their environmental expertise and commitment?

How does our grounds - keeping respect the land? Do we allow any of our land to return to its natural state? How conscious are we of the well-being of the other species with whom we share land?

What further measures can we take to make our energy, water and waste disposal systems environmentally sound?

In considering land protection and the future are we aware of organizations and methods of preserving the land (for example land conservations, land trusts) that are available in our region?





Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace  
Pursuing justice, we seek God's gift of peace.