



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Earth Charter: Incorporate the Principles of the Earth Charter Into Your Justice Agenda

by Reg McKillip, OP

EXPERIENCE

*We are the first generation of people who know that the universe has a history and that we, along with everything else, are participating in a very long and utterly marvelous story.*¹

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.

This new lens has influenced our justice agendas in two ways. First, in seeing our interconnectedness to all of creation, we also see the interconnectedness of all the issues on which we have worked.

We see how hunger is connected to economic systems that prevent the fair distribution of resources. We see how the trafficking of women and children is connected to poverty which is connected to war, which is connected to economic systems and so on. Secondly, we are beginning to understand where our work on ecological issues falls in our justice agenda. As our sister, Sharon Zayac, OP, states, "Eco comes from the Greek OIKOS, which means household. Ecology means understanding the relationships that make up the household. And there are more than just humans in the house. Any work we do then that commits to fostering right relationships within the household is ecological justice. Eco-justice is not a sub-category of justice. It is the context for all works of justice." Therefore, our work for justice in the corporate board rooms, in the halls of Congress, in our social service centers, in our ecology centers, and in our schools is always a call for right relationships with all of creation, and we understand that to mean more than just humans.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The Earth Charter, initiated by a UN Commission, is a document which exemplifies our new knowledge of the universe and can be used as a framework out of which to guide our work for justice. The Earth Charter is a "declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century."² It recognizes that "environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible."³

What makes the Earth Charter so credible is the process in which it

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LCWR
8808 Cameron Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
fax: 301-587-4575
mlucey@lcwr.org



was developed. It is the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with an international document.⁴

It is a People's Earth Charter. Over a 12-year period, thousands of individuals, and hundreds of organizations in 78 countries gave input into the charter. The charter was written by experts and by people from the grassroots. It represents the beliefs of different cultures, indigenous peoples and many diverse sections of society. They all came to a consensus on what are the principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. The Earth Charter Commission approved the final version in March 2000.

The structure of the Earth Charter indicates the inclusiveness of the Charter. The preamble describes the major challenges and choices facing humanity. It challenges us to "...realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more."⁵

There are 16 Principles divided in four parts. The first principle, *Respect Earth and life in all its diversity*, is the foundation of the next three principles in Part I and all the other principles in the charter. Principles 2, 3, and 4 in Part I deal with the relationship between human beings and community, human beings in society, and present and future generations.

Parts II, *Ecological Integrity*, III, *Social and Economic Justice*, and IV, *Democracy, Non-Violence, and Peace*, spell out more fully the meaning of the first four principles. Each part has four main principles with supporting principles which clarify the meaning of the 16 main principles. The conclusion is a call for action. It "...requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility."⁶

The whole charter is understood as a path to peace.

REFLECTION

The basis for our understanding of the goodness of creation comes from Genesis, "God looked at everything that was made and found it very good."⁷ We believe all of creation is permeated with God's goodness. Thus we believe in the sacredness of all life. This is further expressed in the biblical understanding of justice as being in right relationship with all of creation. This belief is evident throughout Catholic Social Teaching. The social teachings emphasize the dignity of the human person as the foundation of a moral vision for society and the value of community as expressed in God's covenant with the people of Israel. The teachings call for a broad vision of justice by improving the conditions of labor, encouraging development and human rights, calling for an end to the arms race, and protecting Earth and her resources.

ACTION

- Have your congregation study the Earth Charter
- Endorse the Earth Charter
- Incorporate the Principles of the Earth Charter into your justice agenda by using the following tool. *When the Central Council of the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa endorsed the Earth Charter, the Ecology Committee designed a tool to use to evaluate how the congregation is fulfilling the Earth Charter's principles. The tool and process is as follows:*
 - Make a three-column chart.
 - The first column list *Principles*. The second column list *Accomplishments* and the third column list *Challenges*.
- In the *Principle* column going down, list principles 5 – 16 (we

started with principle #5 because principles 5-16 spell out more fully the meaning of the first four principles).

- After giving a presentation on the Earth Charter to a committee or department of the congregation, ask the committee/department to study the chart. Have them discuss how their committee/department fulfills each of the main principles.
- Have the committee/department indicate in the *Accomplishment* column next to each principle, which subprinciples they are fulfilling. In the *Challenge* column indicate which subprinciples they should be fulfilling but still need some work.
- Have the group evaluate how their committee/department is incorporating the Earth Charter principles in their work and discuss ways in which they can improve.
- NOTE: Not every principle applies to the committees/departments.

Resources

The Earth Charter Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future. www.earthcharter.org

Zayac, OP, Sharon, *Earth Spirituality: In the Catholic and Dominican Traditions*. Sor Juana Press, Issue no. 1 June 2003

¹ Colebrook Michael, *The New Universe Story*

² *The Earth Charter Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*, Preamble

⁶ *Ibid*, Conclusion

⁷ Gn 1:31