



International Solidarity Reflection

Shalom

SUSTAINABILITY

February 2021

Introduction

Sustainability means living in such a way that future generations have just as many natural resources to satisfy their needs as we do in the present age.

Call to Prayer

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul writes, “From the beginning until now, the entire Creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth” (Romans 8:22). Creation did not happen all at once, and it is not drifting toward Armageddon. Creation is in fact a process that is still happening! Humanity is a part of creating God’s future. What is our role in this marvelous unfolding?

Experience

The U.S.A. is the second highest emitter of CO₂, due to extensive use of fossil fuels. It also rate poorly in the practice of sustainable farming. States along the Mississippi River are using single crop farming, which is depleting the soil and sending water muddied by chemicals into the Gulf of Mexico, thus creating a dead zone.

However, there is encouragement in seeing the growing interest in organic, sustainable agriculture. There is a growing awareness that weed control chemicals carry long-term consequences, and many farmers are exploring alternatives as their understanding of the ecosystem grows.

For example, there is exciting research by the Universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin, U.S.A. in cooperation with family farmers, into a food grain called Kernza, a wheatgrass. As a perennial, Kernza develops an extensive root system, which, instead of depleting the soil, actually builds up the soil and improves water retention. The increased organic material is a phenomenal means to sequester carbon, and it is excellent at protecting shallow water wells from nitrogen leaching from over-fertilized cropland. It is now feasible to market Kernza as a cash crop that is economically competitive to other grains such as corn. Carmen Fernholz, a brother to SSND sisters Kathleen and Annette, is one of the innovators growing this crop, and is actively involved in gathering other growers into a co-op for marketing their production.

On the other side of the world, The Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development called a virtual global conference led by young people from inside the basilica in Assisi, Italy. They were to “imagine a sustainable, inclusive world.” ([Earthbeat](#)) Participants were encouraged to dream of a better world, one in which a green economy would use spiritual capital to create companies that provide jobs that serve the needs of the poor, while at the same time caring for our planet. The young people are urged to commit to focusing on what unites us rather than what divides. What about a Children’s Flourishing Index, which would examine how the economy is serving families, especially the poor?

The Stockholm Resilience Centre (“Sustainability Science for Biosphere Stewardship”) recently observed the tenth anniversary of their Planetary Boundaries chart, which is a graph showing the estimated risk to the Earth. They began tracking environmental changes of nine processes that regulate the stability and resilience of Earth systems. The chart has drawn enormous interest from people all over the globe, awakening us to the impact on our planet of

practices such as deforestation, biogeochemical flows, and different agricultural methods, to name just a few. ([Stockholm Resilience Centre / Research / Planetary boundaries](#))

Also in Europe, a 2015 Euro Commission showed how to achieve multiple benefits to health, the economy and the overall environment, all at lower cost, by using patterns seen in the natural world. They are creating buildings, vehicles, and other projects that can more sustainably address our environmental challenges.

Reflection

You Are Sent states, “We regard all as gift, and ourselves as stewards of whatever is entrusted to us.” ([YASC 16](#)) The General Directory reminds us that, “Because the earth and its resources are God’s gift to all humanity, we are reverent, just, and sparing in our use of created things, concerned for the needs of present and future generations.” ([GD 19a](#)) *Laudato Si’* describes our current systems of environmental destruction and addresses solutions ([Laudato Si’ #20-42; #164-175](#)). Do these statements resonate with me? In relation to the rest of creation, do I consider myself a master, free to use up or consume as much of the Earth’s gifts as I wish, or as a steward caring for Earth, or, perhaps, a responsible participant in Life, borrowing Earth’s treasures while safekeeping them for future generations?

Action

Sustainability will require using only a minimum amount of water to bathe, wash our clothes and our houses, and water our gardens. It may mean walking or riding a bike, or taking public transportation instead of jumping into a car....or a plane! We need to encourage the further development of mass transit in places where it is not easily available. It means using technology to meet virtually, as we have learned to do recently. It probably means changing our diets, choosing to eat less red meat. It means educating ourselves (and our families) about the urgency of the climate crisis, and what we can do to mitigate or reverse global warming. What about supporting community gardens? What are some other ways *you* can live more sustainably?

Closing Prayer

Holy One, Divine Sustainer. You created the earth, the most creative planet we know of, to be able to bring forth life. You situated our beautiful world in the perfect spot in our solar system, and our universe is expanding at exactly the perfect speed. We are filled with awe as we consider what it means to be human, to be here at this time when species are disappearing at a pace never before seen. We pray for wisdom to make good choices so that future generations will have enough clean water and fresh air, and that their farms and gardens will continue to provide healthy fruits and vegetables in abundance, so that all may enjoy life as you intend. We bow down in adoration at the splendor of this wonderful world. Amen.

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