



# Loretto Earth Network News

## ONE CRY

Autumn 2018

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### *The Allure of Mangrove Trees*

By Martha Crawley CoL

At the Loretto Assembly in July Jessie Rathburn spoke a heartfelt apology on behalf of industrial nations, to Maria, Nasreen and Samina, as Pakistani citizens. Jessie referred to some articles she'd read recently about the destructive effects of global warming occurring now in Pakistan. In that moment, for most of us present, I think the slow, gradual, often distant and ever-disputed reality of global warming came home, into our kitchen, into our family room. We, as Loretto Community, have family in Pakistan. As we do in Nicaragua, Haiti, Ghana, Guatemala and Uganda.

I decided to take a look at some of the articles and quickly became bogged down, overwhelmed, by the big picture of climate change. How could one summarize the effect even on one nation, Pakistan? How can we keep it in our daily lives on some real level? How can we comprehend and hold the unimaginable devastation that our "industrial" way of life has on our planet?

I read page after page about the current effects of droughts and floods in Pakistan, the repercussions on people's lives, the devastation



Picture of mangrove by Shirazi, in 12/6/06 online journal "Chowrangi."

causing homes and families to be destroyed, lives to be lost. I lost any ability to try to summarize these cold figures and tragic facts. And, I realized a small thing. In order to open our hearts and minds to a reality as enormous and unimaginable as climate change, we have to let ourselves be open to something, anything, within it that touches our imagination, our sense of wonder, our hearts.

I read that Pakistan is "...covered by mangrove forests" which have "decreased from 400,000 hectares

in 1945 to 70,000 hectares today due to land grabbing, rising sea levels and the decreasing flow of fresh water into the sea." Sualiha Nazar, "Pakistan's Big Threat Isn't Terrorism..." Foreign Policy Journal, 8/10/18.

The mangrove trees caught my wonder. I felt a desire to see and learn about them. I discovered from Wikipedia that they are amazing creatures that grow in the "intertidal regions of tropical and subtropical coastlines..., luxuriant places where freshwater mixes with sea water..."

Their roots are like lean, dancing legs that wade gracefully in coastal waters. They are home to great varieties of fish and sea life. Fisheries are formed in their roots and become essential food sources for thousands of coastal communities around the world.

Mangrove trees allured me to learn more. Maybe the invitation is to let our hearts and minds take occasional note of just one element within the discouraging big picture. Maybe if we could just awaken to something small that ignites a spark for us. Something

that helps us see the beauty, the wonder, the magic, the mystery of our home, planet Earth. A small bit that deepens our desire to live responsibly and save the mangrove trees.



This issue of LEN News coincides with our first season of community group meetings after the 2018 Loretto Assembly. Important commitments are leading us forward from that gathering. At this urgent moment for Earth and all living species including humans, we pause and reflect on our early commitment to Earth:

**“Aware of the immanence of God in all creation, we, the Loretto Community, with joy commit ourselves to deepen our study of the mysteries of the Universe. We pledge ourselves to resist the ongoing devastation of our planet by a prayerful scrutiny of our own use/abuse of the Earth’s gifts, and to work to counter the excessive consumption and greed that our United States culture tends to engender. We promise to collaborate with others to formulate positive programs of responsible relationship with the Earth.”**

Loretto General Assembly,  
July 26, 1994.

Twenty-four years later, in 2018, we challenge ourselves to grapple with current reality in three specific ways. We will explore the feasibility of inter-generational, spiritually-based, sustainable home communities. (See “Dancing Rabbit” as food for thought.) We will study and engage in a decision-making process on ways to preserve the Motherhouse lands that we hold sacred. (“Tribute to the Land” and “Garden at the Motherhouse.”) And we commit to significantly mitigate our impact on climate change and ecological degradation. (Discussion questions arriving in your Community Group packets.)

Our commitment to Earth extends to all living species including humans. As the most vulnerable suffer the most, we recall our 2012 Assembly commitment to stand with Indigenous Peoples in their plea that the papacy as well as our civil government eradicate the mandate of the 15<sup>th</sup> century papal bulls to perpetually dominate and subdue non-Christians and their lands. We continue to educate ourselves on the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery as perhaps the root, in our present culture, of the **One Cry** of Earth and the most vulnerable among us. Our thanks flow to the Aboriginal Land Council and to the Indigenous Youth and Haudenosaunee delegation to the Vatican, featured in this issue and the next.

LEN coordinators have been discussing John Dear’s ***They Will Inherit the Earth***. It is a readable treatise on the Beatitudes as the core of Christian life. They stand in stark contrast to much of what is taken as “Christian” in the public culture, which is more akin to the old “separate, superior, entitled-to-dominate” world view that framed the Doctrine of Discovery. We are fortunate to connect with sources of inspiration from Sisters of Earth and *Laudato Sí* Lines of Action; thank you to Nerinx grad Nicole Heerlein and Loretto-at-the-UN representative Beth Blissman for their timely articles.

Kudos to the Loretto Assembly for making the commitment this summer “to significantly mitigate our impact on climate change and ecological degradation.” As we draw inspiration from Nature, mother of the mangrove trees, let us lead by example by holding one another accountable.

## Editor’s Note:

**Libby Comeaux CoL**



**Loretto Earth Network News**

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# DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

*By Lisa Reynolds CoL*

This past May my partner Zach and I visited Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. While our stay was short, we learned a lot about Dancing Rabbit, its residents, its values and its ongoing work to build and maintain a sustainable community.

Dancing Rabbit is located in northeast rural Missouri near the village of Rutledge. Arriving at “D.R.,” we parked our car outside of the community’s boundaries. Immediately we were met with warm smiles and greetings as we walked up “Main Street” to our designated meeting place. Clearly hospitality was a valued principle at Dancing Rabbit! One of the first people to greet us was Angela, who it turns out rents the house from former resident Ma’ikwe Ludwig, the presenter of LEN/ Outreach’s April 2016 workshop on creating a sustainable community!

Sharon, our Ecovillage Experience Workshop Leader (and D.R. permaculture instructor), met with our group for introductions and some pointers and ground rules. She covered everything from D.R. being a feminist ecovillage with inclusive language, non-traditional gender roles, etc. – to using the compostable toilets.

A tour with Kyle introduced us to the general workings of Dancing Rabbit. Our visit ranged from varieties of sustainably-built homes to the workings of the farm.



The degree of flexibility and trade-offs required to accommodate the realities of sustainability impressed us. For example, attempting to convert to a biofuels tractor proved impractical. Also, they had to purchase a glass crusher because hauling glass and bottles to the town to recycle used too many resources. (They now use the crushed glass in building the roads and in some home construction.)

Answering our questions about diversity, Kyle shared that there was a diverse age range from children to elders, but the population was mostly white. Most residents had several “outside” sources of income – whether through online work or occasional work off-site. The cost of living at D.R. varies depending on one’s living situation; members who have built or purchased their own home lease the land for a penny per square foot per month. Residents also pay a fee to maintain the common areas. Beyond that, it varies by lifestyle choices.

Three areas of focus seemed particularly relevant to Loretto’s recently-passed proposal to explore developing a sustainable community:

**CLEAR DIRECTIVES:** As Ma’ikwe had expressed in her 2016 workshop, it’s important to have a well-defined mission statement. You can’t cover all issues important to every person. But, without imposing

excessive regulations, you can define some basic guidelines that maintain the fundamental values of the community and provide the structure needed for individual expression and creativity. The residents’ experience over time has shown that their focus on six ecological covenants provides the foundation for a collective way of living that enables the flexibility needed to sustain the community. Look for their vision and ecological covenants under the “About” tab on [www.dancingrabbit.org](http://www.dancingrabbit.org), where you will also find their membership agreement and definition of sustainability.

**EDUCATION:** The programs, workshops, work exchange options, and opportunities for hosting visitors reveal that the community values sharing knowledge and experience in sustainability. Providing a good “mixing” of individuals who stay for short-or long-term periods, these events keep the community from getting insular. Requiring an impressive level of organization

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# The Best Solution So Far

By Libby Comeaux CoL

New South Wales is a state in southeastern Australia. More than forty years ago, two hundred leaders of the Aboriginal Peoples created an NGO called New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSW ALC) to advocate for collective land rights. This is a short version of their story.

Several historic events were occurring in that era. There was a plantation walkout from slave labor, leading the NSW voters, by a margin of 97%, for the first time to recognize the legal status of Aboriginal Peoples as human. A Labor government was elected in 1972, partly because of its commitment to Aboriginal Land Rights. There was an Aboriginal Peoples' uprising in 1977 at the Black Theatre in Sydney that prompted a long-awaited government study. Filed in 1982, it stressed the government's obligation, as a matter of "elemental justice," to make recompense for the harm caused Aboriginal Peoples. This recompense would begin with "sacred sites" that only Aboriginal Peoples would have the authority to define.

In 1983, the New South Wales Parliament enacted a Land Rights Act. In a transformative gesture, it made official the grassroots organizing effort that had so successfully won recognition of Aboriginal rights. The Parliament made official the 120 autonomous local Land Councils and a centrally-organized Aboriginal Land Council, each of which would be democratically elected by Aboriginal Peoples. Thus

officially represented, the 123,000 Aboriginal Peoples would have exclusive democratic control over their lands and funds.



*Deputy Chair Anne Dennis*

The funds came from the government setting aside 7.5% of the land tax it received, for a period of 15 years, in the sole control of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. The law decreed that the members of the ALC have no outside employment, and that the Council take full responsibility for its own decisions without any interference from the NSW government. In addition, the government agreed to transfer to the ALC any government-owned lands that were not in use – and any that fall into disuse in the future.

Because of these NSW laws and wise ALC management, the Aboriginal Land Council now holds \$650 million and is the second largest landowner in New South Wales, with 800 hectares gained through 11,000 land claims actions, and an additional 33,000 such actions still pending. When he was Special Rapporteur in 2011, James Anaya described this legal structure as the best

solution to restoring Indigenous Peoples' collective land rights on the planet so far.

Recently the bones of an ancestral woman were accidentally unearthed in Australia. They were dated at more than 60 thousand years old. "We were born from the land," said a participant at the 40-year gala celebrating the founding of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. "We don't own the land; the land owns us."

At the UNPFII side event the NSW ALC presented, I received written materials and a flash drive with their history in photos and slides. When I asked the presenters to describe their experience of surrendering their ancestral relationship with the land to the colonizers' economic model of property ownership, I immediately regretted my question because the anguished response was nonverbally palpable.

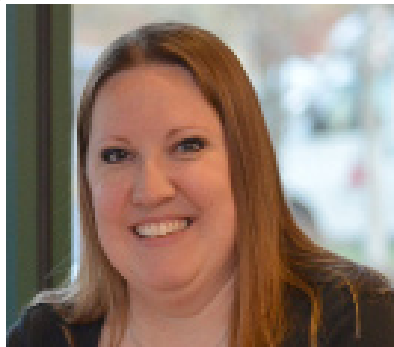
"What choice do they have?" Loretto UN-NGO Representative Beth Blissman asked me later. At the session, in answer to my question, ALC Vice Chair Anne Dennis responded. "This is better," she said, "than living on federal reserves in dog collars."

The urgent need she sees now is for economic development and the education the people need to fulfill their responsibility of self-government in today's political economy. It is a need that she personally devotes her life to fulfill, traveling throughout the lands and ministering to all of the 120 local councils. On her sturdy shoulders rests the promise of one of the most transformational moments in over five hundred years of human history. May the Aboriginal Peoples take heart, accept her leadership, and flourish forever.

# Nerinx Graduate at Sisters of Earth

*By Nicole Heerlein*

I am a proud graduate of Nerinx Hall High School in St. Louis, MO (Loretto), and Quincy University in Quincy, IL (Franciscan). In January of this year, I had the great opportunity to become Director of Franciscans for Earth, a ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in Kirkwood, MO. Founded in 1901 the Sisters moved around St. Louis and the Midwest, opening schools and ministering as a transforming presence in society largely through education and nursing. By the mid-2000s, drawing upon their Franciscan heritage and values, they embraced a new focus called Franciscans for Earth.



**Nicole Heerlein**

As Franciscans for Earth re-focuses its mission and vision, Leadership asked me to attend the Sisters of Earth Conference (SOE), held in Cincinnati in July. Sisters of Earth is an informal network of women who share a deep concern for the ecological and spiritual crises of our times.

I was aware of the Conference emphasis, but I didn't know what to expect. "Sharing the Wisdom, Shaping the Dream: Creating the Future We Want" provided experiences to connect with the Earth, with each other, and assess our own comfort or discomfort regarding our treatment of Earth and each other. A Skype visit with Anne Symens-Bucher, executive assistant to Joanna Macy, gave us the chance to learn from a woman working alongside a

prolific environmental activist. She tirelessly advocates for the common good, inspiring us to take a stand.

The opportunity to think critically about various ways of caring for Creation reminds us that sometimes it's more about what you learn while waiting for the answer than the answer itself.

As I am still relatively new in this journey, I can't tell you how wonderful it was to meet and converse with colleagues in

the field. It was great to learn of individual and organizational journeys and storms in the pursuit for understanding, teaching, and leading.

Speaking of storms, not all storms come to disrupt life; some come to clear the path. The final day opened up conversation on the future of the SOE organization and movement. As many groups are realizing, diversity in participation is key. If we revisit the theme of the conference, what kind of future are we looking at? Ethnicity, age, and other facets of diversity are imperative considerations in bringing everyone to the table so we can get back to understanding, re-connecting, loving one another, respecting differences. After all, we're all in this together.

Life is a series of adventures: waiting for an answer while discerning a trajectory. Change can be hard, but as the Franciscans, Loretos, and countless other communities have learned, it is necessary.

*Congratulations  
to  
Jessie Rathburn Col  
who worked diligently  
to plan and facilitate  
the Sisters of Earth  
Conference.*

**As the conference draws to a successful close Jessie and her companions celebrate by taking a spin around the campus on the solar golf cart invented by the late Paula Gonzalez of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, the community that hosted the 2018 SOE conference.**



**Jesse Rathburn, Diza Velasco,  
Mabel Najarro**

# A garden at the Motherhouse

By Anndavid Naeger SL

Sister Pat Frueh has always been concerned about environmental issues. Having grown up on a farm, she learned early that everything works together for the good of the whole.

Wasting anything was just not acceptable behavior. She can be seen early and late in the day carrying scraps to the compost pile that co-member Susan Classen rigged up for her. Egg shells, coffee grounds, peelings, fruit cores, vegetable scraps are all hauled away to the compost from the main kitchen and dining room. "I have always had a compost operation at the various places where I have lived," she said.

A nurse by profession, Pat studies the needs of Earth around her with a healing approach. Her duties and talents are many and they take her through her day in quiet joy.



***When is the best time to plant a tree? Yesterday.***

***When is the second best time? Today.***

***Chinese Proverb***

## Dancing Rabbit EcoVillage

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and hospitality, these efforts provide some income. This helps sustain the non-profit component of the community and provides personal income to individual workers (at the standard wage of \$10/hour).

**BUILDING COMMUNITY:** While Dancing Rabbit isn't spiritually based, their conscious attention to encouraging communication while respecting privacy and choice showed a sincere level of respect and care for each resident. They regularly practice communication skill-building to maintain connection and a cooperative culture. Their conscientious effort to address conflict nonviolently in a loving and respectful manner revealed the skills, experience and education they have developed to sustain community.



I have only touched upon some of Dancing Rabbit's extensive work to build and maintain a sustainable community. We are grateful for our time spent there and the generous spirits of the individuals we met.

## **2018 Laudato Si Conference Lines of Action:**

- Raise ambition at COP24 for a just transition to achieve 1.5°C goal to protect the most vulnerable. <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/06/08/9-key-moments-road-cop24climate-talks/>
- Deepen action among young and indigenous people during the Vatican Synod on Youth (2018) and the Synod on the Amazon (2019), to ensure long-lasting ecological justice.
- Encourage financial institutions to support decisions towards an integral ecology by "walking the talk" as a Church, including investments with positive social and environmental impact.



# 2018 Rome/Assisi Conference

By *Beth Blissman CoL*

For many years, the Loretto Earth Network has recognized that our current dominant western worldview is not sufficient for a sustainable future. This dominant worldview is based on problematic, dualistic assumptions, such as:

- humans are separate from nature
- increased consumption equals success
- humans are dominant over all other species of life
- male humans are somehow better and more competent than female humans
- lighter-skinned humans are somehow better and more competent than darker-skinned humans
- linear thinking is best
- technology will solve all problems despite the size of the human population
- Earth is an infinite giver

The increasing numbers of catastrophic climate events around the world, as well as the rising number of climate refugees, demonstrate to us that this worldview is not only unsustainable, it is deadly for all species of life on Earth.

How do we integrate ecological sustainability with our very spiritual journeys as we work for justice and act for peace? Especially in a time when the Catholic Church as an institution is coming to terms with the negative effects of millennia of hierarchical rule, might there even be a future role for this institution? Or will we need to look elsewhere?

This past May, I had a fascinating opportunity to explore answers to these questions at the 2018 Rome/Assisi Conference on Spirituality and Sustainability, cosponsored by St. Thomas University in Miami and Forum 21 in New York City. The Conference started in Rome with an audience with Cardinal Peter Turkson, who has been charged by Pope Francis to put *Laudato Sí* into action. We had a lively dialogue, which included a few points of disagreement on two topics — gender and the Doctrine of Discovery — yet we found shared passion for solving the challenges of climate change and overconsumption.

The Conference then moved northwards to Assisi, where we collectively experienced the still present spirits of Saints Clare and Francis. In the mornings we spent time in prayer and presentations from a wide range of ecological spiritual perspectives throughout the US, Japan and Europe. We spent time walking and touring in the afternoons, working up an appetite for the fabulous meals served with fresh, local ingredients.

For me it was a wonderful way to learn from my own religious tradition, as well as a way to learn more about the Earth Charter, indigenous spiritualities, Thomas Berry's *New Story*, and the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). Many action steps emerged. This Part One of two articles will cover *Laudato Sí*.

The vision of integral human ecology in this 2015 encyclical is by far one of the most progressive



and far-reaching contributions to Catholic Social Teaching in the past century. A July 2018 celebration generated a wealth of resources including an inspiring 3.5 minute video outlining five specific proposals for progress, called Lines of Action, see [Laudato-Si-conference.com](http://laudato-si-conference.com). You can take the *Laudato Sí* pledge (<http://livelaudatosi.org>) and engage the faithful in celebrating the annual Season of Creation with other Christian churches, to motivate radical conversion and transformative action (<http://seasonofcreation.org>). You can also join the Global Catholic Climate Movement to enhance worldwide efforts. <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>

In sum, I deeply appreciated the opportunity to dialogue about potential transformative global change, and I look forward to sharing more information in a future article. Until then, may you walk in peace and beauty, with appreciation for the harvest season.

**Access highlights from the September 2018 Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco at [http://:globalclimateactions summit.org/](http://globalclimateactions summit.org/)**

# Tribute to the Land

By Eleanor Craig SL

Life, millions upon millions of years of life, throbbed below this ground, on this ground, above this ground, sustaining and sustained by endless cycles of growth, decline, death, and new life. This land has been Mother to Loretto for more than two hundred years, but it was here eons before Loretto's brief centuries, eons before the five centuries of European immigrants, even eons before the one hundred centuries that ancient peoples made it home. On or near the land we call "ours," hunter-gatherer peoples drew on this land's natural fertility; hunter-farmer peoples cultivated corn and squash. The frontier priest, Stephen Badin, with his slaves, felled trees and built a cabin here. Charles Nerinckx lived here while he hunted souls.

Thirty years after Badin's arrival, Loretto Sisters took his place, put down roots, and prepared to cultivate minds. But, to have a school they also required pasture for milk cows and garden to feed the body; a woodlot for energy, heat and light; and clean fresh flowing water. Through ten generations, this land has been the ground of Loretto's being, ever generous, ever resilient, ever faithful to the mission breathed into it by the Creator.

Our Loretto mission, articulated in the earliest version of I Am The

Way, calls us to "... enter into a life of service, a work of preparing human soil to receive the seed of grace. We are sent to sow the word of God and to help it grow, in whatever way we can..."

Through most of our two centuries at the Motherhouse, and certainly for the past many decades, the daily work of sowing the seeds of truth, beauty and peace has been palpably evident. These grounds played their part as we



## Loretto Motherhouse Land

taught school girls, nurtured young novices' spirits, and renewed the commitments of seasoned sisters.

More recently, through tutoring programs, summer camps for kids, ESL classes, and two enduring retreat centers, we have shared our resources with our neighbors. Loretto's rich legacy has been recognized on these grounds as a National Historic District, and an award-winning Heritage Center has taken shape to share Loretto's story with new generations.

Reviewing just the last four seasons at Loretto Motherhouse, we marvel and are grateful for our natural and cultural ecosystem, abounding with resources for body, mind, and soul, for ourselves and so many others. In the past twelve months, members from the local community and the wider Loretto community gathered for weekend and week-long retreats on these grounds nearly forty times!

More than a dozen Loretto-sponsored days, weekends and full weeks were offered at the Motherhouse for Loretto high school students, Boards of Directors of Loretto schools, and groups of Alums, friends, and novitiate classes. All our guests and retreatants of course, enjoyed the use of many of Loretto's resources: walks on the paths; Mass, prayers, and meals with the community; and precious reflection time beside the lakes and Badin Pond.

Much is happening at our Mother's House! We, the members of the MH Coordinating Board and its Farm and Land committee, are delighted to speak for all the Motherhouse community in saying how grateful we are that we have so much to share. We are pleased to play our part in Loretto's work of seed sowing, nurturance, and hospitality.