



## Loretto Earth Network Celebrates 30 Years

The spiritual dimensions of the environmental movement were already bubbling up in the Loretto Community when interested members gathered in 1992 at Colorado's Shadowcliff Mountain Lodge. This meeting began the Loretto Earth Network.

We dedicate this issue to our co-founders, each of whom sustains the vision of those early days. LEN co-founder Marcella Shields CoL and her husband, Eldon Shields CoL, collaborated with Thomas Berry CP to found the Centre for Creative Ministries. Kathleen Tighe SL gathered our far-flung members into intimate, visionary retreats at Santa Cruz. And Nancy Wittwer SL held us all together for decades from her staff position and her focus on Dreams of Earth.

What happens when a small

group at the margins catches hold of a new way of being? At the margins of mountain ecosystems and the great plains, diversity proliferates and marvelous inventions occur in nature. This is what happens whenever diverse ecosystems commune.

LEN's story is an ever unfolding story of regenerative Earth wisdom juxtaposed with an implicit eurochristian responsibility for a world in crisis. In these pages, we offer a collage of some Loretto Community collaborations inspired, as we are, by that beginning. We wonder, what further collaborations await us? 💧



Photo credit: Paul Tallant.

*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 1994



# Diversity & Innovation at the Margins

## Angelica Village

We begin with a current story of a community that provides transitional support for refugees, immigrants, and formerly unhoused young adults in the Denver metropolitan area. Alongside the rich diversity of human beings is the land, lovingly cultivated over the past two years by Loretto Volunteer **Becca Krasky**. She interned as a Loretto Earth Network coordinator and provides these reflections:

“Many hands make light work.” This was my experience as a LoVo, collaborating with LEN on different projects related to my work at Angelica Village in Lakewood, Colo. For over a year, I helped publish the “Fridays for Earth/Monday Earth Moment/Wednesday Earth Wisdom” series for the Loretto Community. I treasured those nights deep in pandemic lockdown, when LEN coordinator Julie Kerber CoL and I would FaceTime, laughing, crying, and usually eventually writing an announcement.

At Angelica Village, I had the opportunity to help expand

garden and sustainability programming, from planting an orchard and managing the garden to hosting recycling workshops with community members.

Loretto’s Carbon Offset Fund helped us purchase fruit trees for a greywater system, start outdoor mushroom beds, and invest in mulch and cover crops, all carbon-sequestering projects.

We also worked with our local neighborhood group to become a “Sustainable Neighborhood,” collecting food scraps and leaves from neighbors to compost and hosting workshops at Angelica Village.

### **Renata Heberton, co-founder of Angelica Village, adds:**

At Angelica Village, we humbly try to help make this world a better place by alleviating some of the suffering and injustices that we humans inflict upon one another and Earth in profoundly devastating ways. So many people don’t have a community of support built into their lives, because theirs have been demolished and fragment-



Top, left to right: Becca, Cindy, Pablo, Suleiman, Amy (in front). Bottom, left to right: Ashly, Becca, Sevi, Bob and Terri. Photo credits: Amy Van Der Kamp.

ed by wars, poverty, violence, our class system, racism, etc. At Angelica Village we ask, “How can we build and rebuild supportive, nurturing community into our lives?”— particularly into the lives of those suffering from injustice and inequity. 🌱

# EarthLinks

[www.earthlinks-colorado.org](http://www.earthlinks-colorado.org)

Cathy Mueller SL and Bette Ann Jaster OP founded EarthLinks in 1996 after a walk on the beach during an early Sisters of Earth conference. Their deep immersion in the Story of the Universe prefigured intersectionality as we've come to know it.

They fashioned a ministry to the economically poor that connects people and nature through gardening, nature crafts and contemplative visits to the mountains. From a strong foundation nurturing successive leaders, including the inspired outreach and craft sales team of Mary Nelle Gage SL and Ruth Routten CoL, EarthLinks continues to thrive after 25 years.

## Cathy recalls:

During one year, I had the privilege of studying in Israel and working in Ghana. I came home with the lived experience of the interconnectedness of humanity and our Earth. This coincided with the beginnings of the Loretto Earth Network that introduced me to visionaries like Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Miriam Therese McGillis and the seekers in LEN.

After several years of learning from Earth, Bette Ann Jaster and I felt called to begin EarthLinks, to share these insights and experiences with people on the margins of society who did not have the luxury



Illustration by Dori Midnight.

of study yet knew the reality of interconnectedness deep in their being. 🌱

*"My life has never been the same. And I am grateful."*

- Cathy Mueller SL

# Sisters of Earth

[www.sisters-of-earth.net](http://www.sisters-of-earth.net)

Loretto members have spiraled through Sisters of Earth from SOE's 1994 beginning.

Some current LEN co-coordinators planned and/or attended two recent SOE gatherings. The 2018 focus on Joanna Macy's "Work that Reconnects" inspired an interweaving of grief and resolve for Earth. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 gathering morphed from an in-person conference into an online community,

<https://sistersofearthemerging.blogspot.com/>, based on the Decolonial Futures curriculum,

<https://decolonialfutures.net/>. Being instructed by a collective of Indigenous Peoples willing to help us begin to transform inner paradigms has been challenging, to say the least. And we are grateful. 🌱



Jessie Rathburn CoL bringing SOE2018 participants back to session. Photo credit: Jeanette McDermott.

# Regional & Global Collaborations

## The Downstream Neighbor

In 2010, the Loretto Community hosted an internal gathering that led to regional collaborations. The whole Community offered to support individual members in bold works they felt personally called to create. That was the beginning of The Downstream Neighbor Water Symposium.

Sally Dunne CoL lent her support to Libby Comeaux CoL, who quickly contacted internationally renowned water activists Maude Barlow of Canada and Elizabeth Peredo of Bolivia to anchor the event. Drawing on a dozen activist groups in the

Denver area and the networked resources of the Loretto Community, we gathered over 400 scholars, contemplatives, and activists.

The January 2012 weekend symposium served as a counterpoint to a statewide meeting of water barons and policymakers. We imagined Rights of Water rather than water rights as property, and we elevated the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.

We learned of the 15th century papal bulls incorporated into U.S. constitutional law as the Doctrine of Discovery, as well as the need to transform human culture to reflect Nature's law of interiority, diversity, and communion. This event connected and energized a decade of civic works.

**Sally Dunne recalls The Downstream Neighbor:**

We are committed with our lives to building a different model and a different future for humanity, for the Earth, and for other species.

We have envisioned a Moral Alternative to economic globalization and we will not rest until we see it realized.

Maude Barlow



Photo and quote provided by Maude Barlow.

All my recollections of the Downstream Neighbor Symposium relate to the feelings and the general theme of the human right to water.

*"The large public participation was very encouraging."*

– Sally Dunne, CoL

And it was wonderful to engage with the globally recognized expert on the human right to water, Maude Barlow, as keynote speaker and full participant for the entire symposium.

I also remember the fun we had staying at the Loretto Center with her and doing midnight raids on the kitchen for cookies. I don't think Maude had been exposed to a group of nuns quite like Loretos! 🌍

Logo for The Downstream Neighbor 2012, designed by Barbara Donachy.





Top photo courtesy of OVEC. Bottom: Womens Tribunal Appalachia. Elizabeth Peredo Betran and Lois Gibbs at table. Photo provided by Sally Dunne.

# Women and Climate Justice Tribunal

*"If it were terrorists blowing the tops off our mountains, no one would stand for it."*

– Lois Gibbs

Also in 2012, the Loretto Community at the United Nations, the Feminist Task Force of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, the Civil Society Institute, and the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC) partnered to present the first Women and Climate Justice Tribunal in the United States.

This tribunal followed a long line of women's tribunals

that had taken place around the world over the previous several years, catalyzed by the Feminist Task Force led by Rosa Lizarde CoL. Lois Gibbs, awarded the 1990 Goldman Environmental Prize for her work for the Love Canal; Elizabeth Peredo Beltran, coordinator of Blue October Campaign for Water in Bolivia; and Grant Smith of the Civil Society Institute, served as jurists in the Tribunal in Charleston, W.Va. The tribunal presented its findings to the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. 🌍

# Commission on the Status of Women

As this issue goes to press, current Loretto Volunteer **Jax Viteznik** reports,

Loretto at the UN, with Beth Blissman CoL now at the helm, will address the impact of climate change and environmental disasters on gender equality and empowerment during the 2022 Commission on the Status of

Women. In collaboration with LEN, our co-host, we will feature Loretto's work mitigating climate change and empowering women and girls. Both hosts celebrate our 30th anniversaries this year. In my time as a LoVo, I have seen how Loretto is dedicated to these missions and goals, both individually and in how they intersect and relate to each other. As our world continues to face these issues of gender

inequality and climate change, we must see how they impact each other and find solutions that help and empower all. 🌍

*"Since we are a progressive community of educators, we will highlight several projects - in our schools in the US and Pakistan - and then offer participants structured opportunities to share creative, collaborative, regenerative ideas for the future."*

– from CSW66



From left, Beth Blissman CoL of Loretto at the UN, with CSJ global rep Barbara Bozak. Photo credit: Beth Blissman.



# dreams & remembrances

## Marcella Shields CoL

Marcella remembers the years she and Eldon collaborated with Thomas Berry:

The summer of 1982, the Passionist Community of Canada invited me and my husband to work with them full time to build a community dedicated to promoting compassion and peace for persons, communities and Earth.

*"We said yes, committing ourselves to work on the project for three years. We stayed for twenty-two!"*

Thomas Berry, a member of the Passionist Community, who referred to himself as a geologist, met with us to focus our work on the realization that we are all interdependent with Earth and have a profound responsibility for the continuity of life! The three of us met and

struggled to come up with a name for this new venture, finally settling on *The Centre for Creative Ministries*. The word *ministries* in the Canadian context means to be of service to others.

Thomas Berry's works, *The New Story* (1978) and *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), were integrated into the Centre's Compassionate Leadership Program and the programs its graduates designed and presented. When Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme published *The Universe Story* in 1992, we co-sponsored a presentation of their work in Toronto. Graduates of the Compassionate Leadership Program were there with us.

Eldon and I joined LEN when it was founded in 1992 and were very encouraged by Loretto's commitment to establish right relationships between the human community and the earth community. Several founding Loretto LEN members joined Eldon and me for a retreat with Thomas Berry at the Passionist Retreat House in Port Burwell, Ontario, Canada.

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Photo credit: Wren Smith CoL.



## Kathleen Tighe SL

*Kathleen Tighe remembers:*

I made the arrangements for Santa Cruz and also enjoyed decorating our meeting space to reflect the inspiration of the beautiful ocean vistas. One time, Kay Lane SL was celebrating her golden jubilee. Before the retreat she invited everyone to come to her party at our home in Danville, Calif. Those who could, stayed over, and our local neighbors hosted guests in their homes.

After a meal at one neighbor's home, my niece and nephew had us over to enjoy their pool.

*"Seventeen of us enjoyed Mary Catherine's hilarious interpretation of the Telephone Gal, and Gabriel Mary led us in dancing."*

The next morning another neighbor cooked a sumptuous breakfast for us. That was a golden celebration for a jubilee indeed!

## Nancy Wittwer SL

*We are reflecting on Nancy Wittwer's Dream:*

On the sacred grounds of the Loretto Motherhouse in rural Kentucky and beyond, many Dreams of Earth are emerging.

*"Who knows what younger learners may follow in the footsteps of our founders, and what they can do to further the flourishing of Mother Earth?"*

What is our role today in helping them to emerge, strong and fluent in Earth Literacy and Ethics?

## Greg Abernathy

*Greg Abernathy, Executive Director, Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, helped the Loretto Community discern a conservation easement, which will be implemented in 2022:*

Wildlife Corridors. As the Loretto Community spent the last several years discerning how to permanently protect our Motherhouse land, part of our work was to understand the role of this land within the broader landscape. Historically, 85-90% of Kentucky's land was forested; today, only 50% of the state remains forested, and those areas are broken into small tracts by our 85,000 miles of roads and thousands more miles of railroads and utility infrastructure. Protecting Motherhouse land is not only important for all the species who live here, but is

crucial for the many species who rely on connected landscapes as wildlife corridors. As climate change and human development continue to encroach on natural areas, wildlife must continually adapt migratory routes.

*"We can be partners in this process by protecting and preserving landscapes, ensuring these critical connections remain intact."*

## Jessie Rathburn Col

*Dream of Jessie Rathburn, Loretto Community Earth Education and Advocacy Coordinator:*

I dream that humans as a species will enmesh themselves in where they are, learning the intricacies, the beauty, and the pain of our particular place in the world. So often our inclination is to go wider: to visit more places, to study at farther institutions, to witness more varied landscapes. But what if, instead, we stay where we are and go deeper? What if we truly learn how to connect and become part of the landscape?

*"Although trite, the logic remains true: We love what we know and protect what we love. So, let's know our place. Maybe in this way we can reorient ourselves to protection, preservation, and healing for Earth."*



# Web of Being

New. Life. Year. Ideas.  
Hope. Anticipation. Expectation. Fear.  
What might be? Where will we go?  
What is in our backpack?

Maybe growth isn't just vertical  
Shall we strive to be mycelial?  
Where do I stop and you begin?

Growth is evolutionary...like a spiral  
Or, perhaps like Indra's Net?  
We are each a node in a great web  
All interconnected  
Yet each having our own unique gift, our own flavor.

Taking our place, treading lightly  
to not steal the life of another.  
Growing alongside lives innumerable.

Knowing that all lives, human and "other than,"  
are inextricably bound  
-- throughout the Cosmos, throughout time.

We metabolize our mishaps, taking full responsibility in  
the shared resonance of time.

Time that reveals, responsibility that witnesses.  
Evolution of spirit manifesting in shared consciousness,  
proclaiming eternal and enduring relationship.

And Love that Conquers ALL.

Composite poem by Loretto Earth Network Coordinators  
January 2020

## Loretto Community has committed to the Laudato Si' Action Platform

Looking back over the past 30 years, we see how the Loretto Community has deepened our understanding of our role as a human species, broadening our boundaries to work more closely with others engaged in this struggle. On this journey, we turn continually to ecological conversion, actively breaking down habits and patterns that contribute to the marginalization of Earth and her many ecosystems including humans.

This year, we are entering the Laudato Si' Action Platform, collaborating beyond our borders to refashion our lives and think toward integral ecology, asking, "What is Earth calling forth from us now?"

[laudatosiactionplatform.org](http://laudatosiactionplatform.org)



*But we have only begun  
to love the earth.  
We have only begun  
to imagine the fullness of life.  
How could we tire of hope?  
— so much is in the bud.*

— Denise Levertov