

**Awaiting the New Encyclical
and Earth Justice**

dear members

The 114th Congress is in full swing, and we have been actively engaged. We have lobbied in coalitions and on our own. We have had call-in days and email blasts. But in this column I wanted to let you know the measure of your effectiveness.

As many of you know, we have been lobbying on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and the procedural way of handling it in Congress called "Fast Track." We are concerned that the prior trade agreements have resulted in small farmers being forced off their land and into cities. To our knowledge, nothing has been done in the new agreements to address this issue. We expressed our concern to the administration and to a variety of members of Congress.

Our effectiveness as an advocacy organization was highlighted when I was invited in to meet one-on-one with Valerie Jarrett, the president's right-hand advisor. This visit in her West Wing office resulted in a meeting with the Trade Representative's staff. We got to meet with Ambassador Verrett, who is leading negotiations on the agricultural chapter. It was the highest level we have ever gotten on these issues.

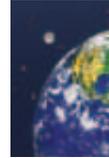
Congratulations to you for helping to make this happen. It is through your advocacy and our work in DC that we have accomplished this level of access ... and we hope, influence. Thank you for making this possible for the common good! Together we are a potent force for good.

Simone Campbell, SSS

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A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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Healing Our People and Our Small Blue Planet

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

Many of us are eagerly awaiting Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment. We have been avidly reading and talking about how to be ready to respond. We have proposed an all-night reading session, a rapid response, a social media campaign. But apart from the tactical response, I believe that we need to pray for "eyes to see."

I know in our advocacy that it is often thought that "you need to do my issue." With the notoriety of our bus, many have asked us to endorse their efforts by "bringing our bus" or doing an entire trip on someone else's agenda. Sometimes in our office we have rollicking (and heated) conversations about climate and economic justice issues. We sometimes get caught in dichotomous thinking—that if you don't "do" climate, you are not with it. Or if you don't "do" the economic agenda to mend the income and wealth gaps, you have not addressed the crying need of our time. It is tempting to get into the polarization of being correct, virtuous and, in a word, right.

But if we are to effectively address these issues, we need to take our lead from Pope Francis. He is correct when he says, "Inequality is the root of social ills." This includes the environment. Will we be ready to embrace the challenge of dialogue that includes a "both/and" strategy? Environment and the economy are not separate.

In our nation we see that inequality in access to energy-efficient appliances and construction creates added burdens for those at the economic margins. More low-income neighbor-

hoods are exposed to or built within toxic sites. People with low incomes are not able to afford newer, more fuel-efficient cars.

One example of this is in our federal housing policy. It is true that our housing policy for low-income families is in abysmal shape. Despite years

of advocacy for the National Housing Trust Fund, it has never been funded in any measure significant enough to address the housing crisis in our country. However, some policies have helped remediate housing in low-income communities. A program started by one of my Sisters focused on lead

paint removal in apartments in central Los Angeles. Trained residents got jobs doing the testing and removal. It was a wonderful win/win/win for the neighborhood, for working people and for the environment. Internationally, people with low incomes are most adversely affected by changes in climate. The prime minister of the Republic of Maldives recently held a press conference underwater to highlight the fact that with a one-inch rise in sea levels, the Maldives islands basically disappear. In Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa, the desertification of previously arable land is creating migration and civil unrest. In short, people living in poverty in our world bear the brunt of environmental degradation.

When we advocate for the environment, we advocate ending some of the economic disparities in our world. Our economic advocacy (and, in fact, all advocacy) needs to include environmental awareness and concern.

So as we approach the release of the new encyclical on the environment, let us pray together for eyes to see the connections. Then, as we see our part, let us act with care for the whole that our earth and our people will be healed. Let us pray for a vision that affirms all aspects of the struggle to heal our world. Our "One Body" is acting in a variety of ways, but all centered on creating this new order where all can live in dignity and peace ... even our small blue planet.

Sister Simone Campbell is NETWORK's Executive Director and author of A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community.



of advocacy for the National Housing Trust Fund, it has never been funded in any measure significant enough to address the housing crisis in our country. However, some policies have helped remediate housing in low-income communities. A program started by one of my Sisters focused on lead paint removal in apartments in central Los Angeles. Trained residents got jobs doing the testing and removal. It was a wonderful win/win/win for the neigh-

Promise of Encyclical Stirs Winds of Hope

BY SISTER LEANNE JABLONSKI FMI, PhD

The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing... through the middle of the street of the city. On either side... is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1-2)

News of Pope Francis's upcoming environmental encyclical is stirring winds of hope. Our pope is full of surprises and challenges that inspire bold, prophetic action. Many speculate on content and what it will mean. How will the Vatican's voice contribute to the United Nations environmental work and the year-end universal climate change agreement in Paris? What do we hope Pope Francis will say to Congress in September? What does each of us need to hear, and what actions can we take in response?

As both a scientist and woman of faith, excitement is an understatement of my anticipation of the encyclical. As the first rumors grew in crescendo, I even pinched myself—just to be sure I wasn't dreaming. It seems we are really at a time like that of Anna and Simeon being presented with the Christ Child (Lk 2: 25-37)—seeing something in our day I wasn't sure that I would ever see. Both in the environmental challenges of our time, and the coming together of many to strive for collective solutions. And as with Jesus in his day, the hope and promise of the incarnation—God with us—was borne into a world in dire need of the message and promise of change.

The impact of the encyclical is extending far beyond Catholics engaged in environmental concerns. A religious statement on the environment is drawing excitement from other Christian denominations and world religious traditions. It is seen as an opportunity for internal education of members as well as raising our collective voices for the integrity of all creation—and about the impact of environmental degradation on the economically poor and vulnerable locally and globally.

The secular environmental community is also buzzing. At the Ecological Society of America 100th anniversary meeting this August in Baltimore, scientists and faith leaders from diverse tradi-

tions will share in several sessions aimed at exploring how scientists and people of faith can collaborate to achieve justice together.

Why is an encyclical important?

Such an ecclesial event gives us the opportunity to have a great impact in our church and for our faith witness to environmental justice—the importance of caring for all of nature and addressing the huge global challenge of climate change.

- It is an opportunity for our witness of faith and justice values and their application—to educate and engage others of diverse talents—both internally and externally, on a critical justice issue.
- It is an opportunity to take action where we can as individuals, groups, communities—in local to global ways.
- It is an opportunity to collaborate with other faith traditions and likeminded individuals to truly build a world of justice and peace—an environmentally sustainable future for all.

Through the lens of the encyclical, we can be inspired and empowered to action in each of our roles—from the level of the individual, our local communities, our networks of religious families and organizations—to a global impact.

My story and the importance of people of faith and scientists working together

I professed first vows as a Marianist Sister in 1982, and following the call to be a bridge-builder between science and faith communities, I then did graduate work in biology, and also religious studies work on this relationship, meanwhile watching the faith community begin to explicitly articulate environmental care. I then specialized in climate change and plant ecology in my science doctoral work in the 1990s.

At global climate change research conferences, I witnessed firsthand the growing consensus of scientists on the reality of climate change, and the high statistical improbability that the higher temperatures and related events were merely due to chance. As scientists, our quest is ongoing, data is subject to rigorous review, and hypotheses are tested repeatedly. We're good at facts and data and complexity. Yet, we've realized we can't stand silent as we piece together vast environmental changes underway that human actions can shift. As scientists, we've gradually realized the importance of contributing to the public policy process from our science expertise, and of learning how to communicate what we know to the general public in understandable ways.

I've been inspired by the 1991 Open Letter to the Religious Community, where 32 Nobel laureate and other eminent scientists recognized common interests of the two groups and the need for both scientific and sacred understanding:

"Many of us have had profound experiences of awe & reverence before the universe. We recognize that what is regarded as sacred is most likely to be treated with respect. Efforts to safeguard planetary environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred and as a universal moral priority."





Flowering dogwood shrub in the Mount St. John Nature Preserve woodlands understory

MEEC STAFF

From this, The National Religious Partnership for the Environment, www.nrpe.org, was born (engaging the four major bodies that were nationally organized at the time: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; National Council of Churches; Evangelical Environmental Network; and Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life).

Environmental Professor Gus Speth expresses faith engagement as critical in his 2007 statement: “I used to think the ‘big three’ were climate, biodiversity, and pollution, but after many years of work I think pride, apathy, and greed are even bigger. We need cultural and spiritual transformation, and science doesn’t do that—the church does that.”

What wisdom can trees offer us for approaching the encyclical event?

In my own pondering I’ve often been drawn to think of the image of trees as a wisdom guide to the experience of this upcoming ecclesial event—in the richness of their spiritual symbolism (from Genesis to the cross to Revelation), their grandeur and longevity of the plant kingdom, and their universality. On a more personal note, their deep roots (with just as much biomass extended

below as above ground) remind me that there is more to discover and know in my own identity and role in acting on behalf of all the earth’s creatures. I was well into adulthood and decades of science research conducted with plants before I realized I was following my lineage of peasant-farmers, and that my family tree name itself derives from the Polish *t*, which means apple tree. Perhaps each of us has these identity/awareness moments in our own journey.

Why are statements on environmental care particularly important at this time? Caring for all of creation, or earth stewardship, is part of ancient biblical teaching. When most of the population was rural or more directly connected with the agrarian seasons and rhythms because their family or cultural group was directly providing the food and shelter, there wasn’t as much need for explicit mention. And this care was implied in other principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

However, with the shift to the cities of the past century, there is greater need to be explicitly reminded of our roots and interconnections with the nonhuman world. Additionally, the discoveries in science over the past several decades—of understanding the origin of the universe, the functioning of ecosys-

tems, and all the fields that contribute to the science of climate change—show our interconnection and reliance upon the components of the physical world around us.

I expect that in the encyclical, Pope Francis will guide Catholics to a better understanding of this opportunity to care for creation and our sisters and brothers. I trust that science will have informed the context of the encyclical. As the science has become clearer about humanity’s impact on the natural world, the Church’s voice has become clearer. Recent popes and the U.S. bishops have spoken on the need to address climate change and care for creation: Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI rooted care for the environment in the need for solidarity with other people and with God’s creation. Both popes warned about human contributions to heat-trapping gases and climate change, as did the U.S. bishops in their 2001 statement that called for prudent action on climate change.

I expect that Pope Francis will make a strong case for the moral issue of our call to care for the poorest and most vulnerable people among us, and will link this to forming solutions to confront climate change. The Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has issued assessments on the status of climate change over the past 25 years, has connected to the theme of global environmental injustice—enunciating that the poorest people are the ones least responsible for climate change and suffer its worst consequences. The basic human right of access to clean water, food and shelter is threatened by our planet's warming, and with increased snowmelts, droughts, storm severity and frequency, we are seeing a disproportionate impact on areas of the world already challenged by food shortages, water procurement and heat-stress events.

Solving climate change protects God's people. Whether it's someone in Ohio suffering from asthma, someone in Quito suffering from a mudslide, or a Pacific Islander experiencing salt water intrusions destroying arable land, climate change hurts humanity. I imagine the encyclical will emphasize the important perspective of loving our neighbors, and connecting loving our neighbors with protecting them from climate impacts, including increased disease, extreme weather and food insecurity.

Science of ecology can guide us in finding our right relationships

"We have, in a sense, lorded it over nature, over Sister Earth, over Mother Earth," said Pope Francis on January

15. Our rightful place within creation respects and protects the interconnections of the vast web of life. The word ecology derives from the Greek *oikos* or house—the same root as the house churches of the Acts of the Apostles.

Our modern notion of our household has been expanded by science, however. We now know that the same molecules of air that we breathe are those inhaled and exhaled by the apostles and their ancestors. And Jesus and our founders and some characters with whom we might not like to be associated! In fact, the air from an hour of our community prayer will pass through the breath of every child born that year during their lifetime. There are no border crossings. When I reflect on this the world becomes smaller, more intimate. I'm more able to see that my actions and the actions of my local community can have impacts all across the globe.

This interconnection and interdependence apply also within the more local level of ecosystems. An ecosystem is a geographic area with all the living organisms present and the nonliving parts of their physical environment. It involves the processes of movement and storage of energy and matter through living things (plants, animals, microbes) and activities.

The entire ecosystem—be it woods, prairie or pond—is greater than the sum of its parts, and it functions as a whole,



HELEN SHEEHAN

Author with Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley at the Univ. of Dayton in March, where they joined representatives from business, government, health, nonprofit and faith communities to discuss a sustainable vision for Ohio and benefits of renewable energy and energy efficiency

keeping a balance. As ecologists we have been studying ecosystem properties and the great benefits to humankind of free services—from purification of air and water to protection from floods, radiation, heat and erosion, to serving in pollination, seed dispersal and soil formation. Unfortunately, these services are not accounted for in our economic system of land sales, and take a great deal of time to restore when destroyed. This, in

Planting native plants attracts and services wildlife. The common milkweed is a host for the monarch caterpillar, and the New England Aster (pictured here) is a nectar food source for the butterfly as it flies through North America to its overwintering mountainous sites in Mexico.



MELO STAFF

turn harms humans who are part of the whole ecosystem. As humans, we are intrinsically part of this natural world.

In our work at the Marianist Environmental Education Center (MEEC) (meec.udayton.edu), we engage in restoration ecology to restore ecosystems and the relationships between land and people. Land service volunteers (one-time to regular) work with us, in conscious mutual service. Our planting native plants suited to the light and soil moisture habitats helps restore these services by attracting native insect pollinators and other wildlife and by building up the soil, ultimately creating healthy and diverse ecosystems.

Land restoration and conservation must be a centerpiece of our response to climate change. Protected lands already provide habitats for 80% of the world's protected species. Land conservation is also a proven strategy for removing carbon pollution—which drives climate change—from the atmosphere. In the U.S., natural lands already capture nearly 15% of our carbon dioxide emissions. Protecting more land will both expand this bank and preserve habitat.

Conversely, when land is converted for development, more carbon is released and this increases the heat-trapping blanket effect of the atmosphere, which causes global warming. The land loses its ability to act as a carbon sponge.

MEEC has been educating and taking action on climate change and energy issues, collaborating with the networks and resources of the Catholic Climate Covenant (catholicclimatecovenant.org), the Global Catholic Climate Movement (catholicclimatemovement.global), the Justice Conference of Women Religious (jcwr.org) and Interfaith Power and Light (www.interfaithpowerandlight.org), to name a few.

I've been particularly empowered through *Nuns on the Bus Ohio*—with its vision of Moving Ohio with Passionate Voices for Justice. Our mission: Inspired by Jesus, motivated by Catholic Social Teaching, impelled by a vision of an interdependent creation, in solidarity with those at the margins, we network and advocate for a just and peaceful world. Our network of vowed religious women and laity was inspired by our participation in NETWORK's national



Nuns on the Bus tour through Ohio, and we are continuing the journey! We've discovered that collaboration among our diverse charisms, and between our often siloed Ohio cities, provides an important witness and support. We chose environmental concerns of climate change and energy as one of our two major foci. In the past year, we have been organizing and bringing the faith voice highlighting impacts on the economically poor and vulnerable through press conferences, letters to the editor, dialogues with elected officials, and educational events to address federal EPA Clean Air rules and Ohio renewable energy and energy efficiency policies.

Prayer for Our Harmony

Mary, daughter of Wisdom
We, your family, are tired
We desire to be your living presence anew

Form us as your rain
Quenching parched souls with hope

Form us as your fire
Illuminating indifferent hearts with faith

Form us as your wind
Refreshing dusty minds with wisdom

Form us as your soil
Embracing all with compassion

In all these ways of life
Form us, so that

Your seed of justice sown deep within us will flourish
Bearing abundant fruit
Of peace and integrity

Joined together with all creation
We will once again sing in harmony

—Leanne Jablonski FMI 1.23.06

Our unique niche—Exploring the gift of our charisms

In ecological terms, a niche describes the unique role of a species in its community—where it lives, and its interconnection with other species (e.g., what it eats/consumes and who eats it; what is fed or nurtured by it). Analogous to this, is the richness of the charisms of our religious families—how the Spirit inspired our Saints and Founders to respond to the needs of the times—with particular gifts and approaches that resonated with the people and the needs, and contributed to the whole. The ecological encyclical and the environmental needs of our day are an opportunity for renewal and to be a lens for reflecting on the gift that each of our charisms can contribute, and how we might adapt them to today's needs. Together, each of our charisms, like flowers and tree species, make up a beautiful garden of life.

My poem, "Prayer for Our Harmony," emerged from praying with the earth from my Marianist charism on a 30-day retreat. May our nurturing work with the upcoming ecological encyclical bear much fruit for all of us who together

make our common home, earth. In the spirit of joyful Pope Francis, in our earth-care may we echo the Psalmist as "lovers of justice" (Ps 89), as those who make justice their bliss.

Marianist Sister Leanne Jablonski FMI, PhD is a plant ecologist, educator and pastoral minister engaged in climate science, faith and justice outreach regionally to nationally. She directs the Marianist Environmental Education Center (meec.udayton.edu); and at the University of Dayton is a coordinator in the Hanley Sustainability Institute and the Sustainability Energy Environment Initiative.

Dangerous Legislation Moving in Congress

By NETWORK'S GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TEAM

This year, NETWORK is ensuring social justice advocates have updated information about many dangerous pieces of legislation moving in Congress, including attempts to “fast track” U.S. trade policies, undermine President Obama’s executive action on immigration, push various anti-immigrant bills and amendments, delay renewal of funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), dismantle the Affordable Care Act, and propose federal budgets that would shred the social safety net.

But, there is hope! NETWORK has already seen signs that our advocacy in 2015 has helped slow down “fast track” as well as protect our nation from anti-immigrant amendments to the Department of Homeland Security funding bill.

That said, we still have a lot of advocacy work ahead of us in the 114th Congress and are counting on all of you to help!

Trade

The Obama administration, along with Republican allies and a handful of Democrats, will seek passage of a bill that grants the administration fast track trade authority. Under fast track, trade agreements are not considered under normal congressional rules and instead automatically receive an up or down vote in both chambers of Congress. Members of Congress may not offer amendments to a trade agreement.

A bipartisan fast track bill co-spon-

sored by Senators Hatch (R-UT) and Wyden (D-OR) was supposed to be introduced in February, but was stalled due to intense political pressure on Senator Wyden by labor groups, environmentalists, consumer groups and faith groups. Senator Hatch suggested that he would push a Republican-only bill if Senator Wyden did not agree to legislative language in April. A Republican-only bill would be extremely difficult to pass.

Fast track legislation, however, will be won or lost in the House of Representatives. House Ways and Means Committee Chair Paul Ryan (R-WI) promised to pass a companion bill to Senator Hatch’s legislation once it clears the Senate. The final vote count in the House could be razor-thin.

Representative Sander Levin (D-MI), the lead Democrat on the Ways and Means committee, has not taken a position on fast track. He believes that since the administration is finalizing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, Congress should instead be focused on shaping the agreement, not on passing legislation to grant fast track. He has outlined his trade priorities for the TPP, which include strong labor and environmental safeguards, provisions to protect patient access to medicines, provisions to address the issue of currency manipulation, and limitations on the ability of trade courts to attack domestic health, safety and environmental regulations.

Immigration

The first two months of 2015 saw a heated and divisive battle over renewal of funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) before its February expiration date. Republicans in both the House and Senate sought to use the funding deadline (and the accompanying looming threat of a DHS shutdown) as a vehicle to undo President Obama’s November 2014 executive actions on immigration. Although funding DHS means funding detention facilities for some of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, our advocacy, including the NETWORK community’s more than 1,000 phone calls to Congress, helped pass a DHS funding bill free of anti-immigrant amendments that could cause further harm.

After the DHS funding debacle, many members of Congress lost their desire to work on immigration, believing there is lack of political will or that President Obama will veto any legislation put forward. NETWORK and our allies are watching new efforts by some members of the House Judiciary and House Homeland Security committees to pass legislation that could further harm our immigrant brothers and sisters by rolling back the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008, criminalizing compassion for immigrants, or militarizing our border. Meanwhile, President Obama’s executive action on immigration is being challenged in court by a Texas judge, delaying its full implementation. NETWORK and our fellow advocates will continue to protect the executive actions, prevent anti-immigrant bills and amendments, and call for comprehensive immigration reform.

Healthcare

A top priority for NETWORK over the past few months has been ensuring that funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) does not expire in September. CHIP and Medicaid, along with private insurance, ensure that 93% of U.S. children are covered. In addition to children, CHIP also provides affordable

Statue of George Washington by Jean Antoine Houdon in the U.S. Capitol’s Rotunda, which is draped during dome renovations



ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL



Pediment of the U.S. Supreme Court

insurance to pregnant women. Speaker John Boehner and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi negotiated an agreement that paired reform of the Medicare physician payment system with a two-year extension of CHIP, and the measure was quickly passed 392–37 in late March. The Senate brought up the identical bill in April and also passed it by a large, bipartisan majority (92–8).

In March, another challenge to affordable healthcare began—the *King v. Burwell* Supreme Court case. This case challenges the legality of federal subsidies for individuals and families in states without healthcare exchanges when they sign up through the federal healthcare exchange. Sister Simone Campbell joined other faith leaders to speak and pray in front of the Supreme Court about the detrimental effect of losing these subsidies for tens of thousands of individuals and families.

As other challenges continue to emerge, NETWORK will keep working to protect and expand affordable, accessible healthcare for all.

Budget

The budget is a moral document. You have heard NETWORK state that often over the years. It reveals the real

values of those who prepare and vote on it. There are distressing messages in the Fiscal Year 2016 budget resolutions passed by the House and the Senate. To give you a small sample, here are a couple of quotes from the House budget document:

“Ensure that Certain Groups of Undocumented Workers Remain Ineligible for Federal Benefits.” p. 117

“It is imperative that the President’s health care law be repealed.” p. 66

“Committee on the Budget may revise budgetary levels ... that consists solely of the full repeal of the Affordable Care Act and the health care-related provisions of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010” p. 66

Although the Joint Budget Resolution is nonbinding, it sets boundaries for spending in appropriations. Military spending will be increased by as much as \$94 billion through Overseas Contingency Operations funding. With little if any revenue raised, the only way to increase Pentagon spending is to drastically cut human needs-related non-defense spending.

Even drastic cuts to human needs programs cannot produce sufficient sav-

ings to support the proposed military spending and spending through tax expenditures. Therefore, both proposals call for cuts and structural changes to mandated programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps).

All congressional committees will report back to the budget committee which programs they will cut or eliminate to reduce spending by July 2015. A major intent of the budget is to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, and the relevant committees have been instructed to find ways they can diminish its effectiveness and ultimately destroy it.

The budget is not binding, nor does it need to be signed by the president. The appropriations bills flowing from this budget *do* need to be signed by President Obama, and it is unlikely that he would sign any of the most egregious. There may be enough votes to override the president’s veto.

This is a long road, just beginning. Your ongoing work of contacting your legislators is critical to protection of all of our people, not just those who already have the greatest power and wealth.

Want timely information about key issues in Congress? NETWORK members can sign up for our weekly email legislative updates. Send your name, zip code and email address to networkupdate@networklobby.org.



Faces of Environmental Problems in Nigeria and Possible Solutions

BY SISTER RITA EZERWEM

Nature is being ravaged in the name of development. We fail to realize that nature can provide for the need of everyone, but not for the greed of everyone. It should be noted, however, that most of society's problems caused by human beings are due to poverty and not knowing that what we are doing is harmful to the environment.

The earth is a global village. Continents look apart geographically, but ecologically they are close to each other and affect each other's welfare. We are all under one sky and if the layer which envelopes the earth is pierced, we all suffer. If forests are destroyed in one continent, the effects are felt in other continents.

Nigerian Challenges

The geographical, geological and geomorphological settings of Nigeria present her with ecological/environmental challenges. In ecological terms, it is a land of extremes and has remained constantly at risk for ages, with the more recent phenomenon of global warming further accentuating the rate of environmental degradation. It is interesting to note that Nigeria is bounded in the south by over 850km of active coastline and in the north by a similar length

of the Sahara Desert. The country is therefore permanently being ravaged by coastline erosion to the south as well as desertification to the north

Overpopulation: The human quest to gain dominion over all negates the simple law of creation—God created them equally. Any overpopulated country has a big challenge and Nigeria, with the highest population in Africa, faces the consequences of poverty, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure such as housing, education, water and food. Nigeria also suffers an increase in crime rate and spread of diseases. (God was merciful to have saved Nigeria from the deadly virus EBOLA.) Hence, the game of survival of the fittest becomes the order of the day. Increase in population also leads to more housing clustered together devoid of good ventilation, and this could also lead to cutting of more trees and desertification.

Locally, we have been engaging women in dialogue and educating them on the danger of having many children. We also use our schools to educate young girls and boys on the same topic.

Urbanization: Problems associated with urbanization include high crime rates, unemployment, housing problems, inadequate health facilities, high

cost of living, and neglect of agricultural practices, which causes low production of food and raw material because many able young people abandon villages, leaving only the aged to take care of farms, which obviously cannot be same. Other effects are pollution such as indiscriminate refuse disposal in wrong places, thereby blocking the drainage system and causing serious erosion and floods. Trees will also be cut down before houses or industries can be planted, thus uncovering the environment and opening it to natural dangers like storms.

The good news is that we work with local dwellers and some government agencies to ensure that refuse is dumped in farmland to act as manure for viable production. In our school, we ensure that non-biodegradables are burnt in the incinerator and biodegradables are poured on the farm.

Desertification can be caused by humans or natural disasters like frequent storms and drought. Desertification is very dangerous to people, animals and the environment as a whole. It leads to famine, asthma and other deadly diseases; it destroys livestock and crops.

Between 50% and 75% of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Yobe States



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are under threats of desertification. These ten states, with a population of about 27 million people, account for about 38% of the country's total land area. Population pressure has resulted in overgrazing and over-exploitation for fuel wood of marginal lands. Drought due to global warming has accelerated the rate of desertification.

Deforestation, another great threat, is caused by man himself. Trees are important for shelter, the economy, food, storm-breakers, and raw materials for rubber, cotton and cooking (wood and charcoal). However, higher demand for agricultural land, livestock production and fuel wood threatens the forest. These demands will continue to increase with the population if nothing drastic is done. The age-old practice of shifting cultivation ("slash-and-burn") will also continue to drive this threat as farmers continue to move, plundering our forests as the soil fertility in the farms declines.

Studies show that deforestation is a serious problem in Nigeria, which currently has one of the highest rates of forest loss (3.3%) in the world. Since 1990, the country has lost some 6.1 million hectares or 35.7% of its forest cover. Between 1990 and 2005, the country lost a staggering 79% of these forests and, since 2000, Nigeria has been losing an average of 11% of its primary forests per year—double the rate of the 1990s. These figures give Nigeria the dubious distinction of having the highest deforestation rate of natural forest on the planet.

Consequences include uncontrolled wind that destroys houses and properties, erosion causing gullies, excessive heat, diseases like meningitis, and

washing away of topsoil needed for food production.

Another major problem in Nigeria is environmental pollution. Pollution can be categorized into three, which are air, water and land pollution:

Air pollution is the discharge of gases into the environment which are harmful to people. Air pollution is well pronounced in the urban areas where there are industries, cars and other heavy-engine machines. Carbon monoxide is released into the environment, and this is very dangerous.

Water pollution is usually caused by some chemicals coming from industries and waste products flooded into the water. However, the Apostolic Vicariate of Kontagora, in Niger State, engages in provision of water to rural dwellers with well-constructed wells and all the health and hygienic factors in place. Animators are sent to educate the dwellers on the proper use, management and maintenance of these wells.

Land pollution is the occurrence of unwanted materials or chemicals on land. For example, adding fertilizers to the land in order to enhance farm products is harmful to the environment. Challenges include refuse from homes, industries and markets, especially non-biodegradable nylon bags. Others are sewage from homes and offices, and let us not forget oil spillage. These pose many problems like offensive odour from decayed refuse, diseases (respiratory disorder), and destruction of plant and animal life. We tackle this challenge through sensitization exercises. We educate on how to take care of refuse, either burning it in an incinerator or dumping it on farmland to enrich and

act as manure to the soil. We also teach that sewage should be channeled appropriately to avoid contaminating drinking water and constituting an eyesore, and finally that urban waste should be burnt or braced.

A fourth kind of pollution, **noise pollution** has also invaded our society. As one lands in any Nigerian airport, the first thing that welcomes you is noise. It is becoming difficult to find a place where one can be without this menace. Sources of noise include factories, generators, advertising vehicles, churches and mosques, ringing tones of mobile phones, airplanes and cars. Does this affect us? Yes, of course, as in loss of hearing or deafness, sicknesses such as high blood pressure, emotional disorder, intrusion of privacy, and disrespect to nature. A peaceful, quiet environment can be reclaimed when there is reduction of noise from loudspeakers and cars. Railways and airports should be sited far away from residential areas and there should be soundproof walls around industries and generators.

Beauty

Finally, every human person loves, craves and wishes for beauty. It is therefore important that all hands be on deck to control all the problems mentioned above. This fight is not only for environmentalists but is also the responsibility of government, non-governmental bodies, and individuals who truly love the country. They should come together to protect our environmental resources such as air and water quality, natural habitat, preserving forestry and building a sustainable future for us all. Once more, the families should be sensitized about family planning to control fertility rate and we should not base everything on technology but try natural means so that co-existence of created things will be preserved and nurtured.



COURTESY THE AUTHOR

Sister Rita Ezekwem, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, is the head teacher at St. Michael's International Secondary School, Kontagora, Niger State in northwest Nigeria.

Educating Nigerian Students about Ecological Justice

By SISTER CHIDIEBERE UMEASIEGBU

The environment is abused in many ways in Nigeria, such as through deforestation, improper disposal of garbage, and sewage. Fire is set on a daily basis in forests around Nigeria. This is because people hunt, and animals run into the hands of their captors in a quest to escape the fires.

Often, a big hole is dug where trunks of trees are chopped up and set on fire before covering them with sand. This is to produce hard charcoal for cooking, and a lot of money is made from this. Thick dark smoke is generated also, and this is discharged into the atmosphere. At the moment, there are no laws protecting our forests—no forest guards. Some forests that were once owned by the government have been sold and diverted to private ownership and usage.

Garbage and Sewage Disposal

In some states, bin men and women are employed to clean and take care of refuse from homes and business centres. Bins are kept at designated areas for the convenience of the people. However, in some places the refuse is not disposed of early enough, and the whole vicinity is polluted. People around these areas live with the stench for months.

Also, some people still throw garbage into drainages/gutters, especially when it is raining. They think floodwater can flow away with the garbage to unknown places. Instead, the drainages are blocked, causing the flood to overflow onto the roads and tarmac. The garbage is littered when the water dries up.

Teaching Our Students

We teach environmental care in art subjects such as Civic Education and Christian Religious Knowledge and in science subjects such as Biology and Basic Science. The students are made conscious of litter—always pick it up. Effects of pollution are discussed and projects are carried out. Appropriate disposal methods are also taught. The first environmental day was launched in 2010 when some students went out to the street to pick up litter. Bushes were planted around the school premises, and the students were encouraged



COURTESY THE AUTHOR

to extend this new insight to their home environment.

Why This Is Important

An eye-watering aspect of this environmental abuse is the fact that most people can urinate or defecate anywhere. One can stand or stoop comfortably by the roadsides or under any little bush even when toilets are provided. This is evident around marketplaces and mostly done by menfolk. People pass by them without a word, not even from law enforcement agents. When on a long-distance journey, drivers always pull over by the roadsides to ease themselves in the bushes or in the gutters.

On the whole, there are no serious plans on how to manage waste gathered by the bin men and women. In some fallow grounds lorry loads of this are tipped, thereby polluting these areas. Decay-able materials are not separated from the heap. Waterproof materials that can be recycled are not gathered so on windy days these can be seen floating

around—and can be blown back into people's homes. Recycling is not yet popular both in principle and in practice.

For anyone who tries to stop or speak against environmental abuse, a whole lot of problems loom. This person is not protected in any way by law and so his / her life can be endangered. People hardly spare anyone who militates against their source of livelihood. Besides, there is little or no awareness of the effect and dangers this poses for human health today and for future generations. To curb this, there must be proper sensitisation from the grassroots. This is the intention of the government in including that as one of the courses of study in schools. However, more should be done to educate the public so that education received in the classroom will be well grounded.



Sister Chidiebere Umeasiegbu, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, is the head teacher at Notre Dame High School, Awkunano, Enugu, Enugu State in eastern Nigeria.

Sisterhood and Justice: An Interview with Sister Carol Coston, OP

By ALLISON WALTER

Not many are blessed with the gift of seeing their dreams sprout wings and fly. Sister Carol Coston is one of those lucky few. A founding member and the first executive director of NETWORK, Carol has seen the organization grow from a handful of kindred souls scrawling their plans on the backs of paper napkins to the spirited community of social justice advocates that it is today.

With a heart for ecology, a mind for economy, and a zeal for justice, Carol is an invaluable part of NETWORK's history. Anticipating the pope's forthcoming encyclical on ecology, I talked with Carol about her love for ecological and economic justice, as well as her fond memories of NETWORK in its youth.



Carol Coston at Santuario Sisterfarm, an ecology center in Texas cofounded by Sisters Carol Coston and Elise Garcia

Q. Tell me a bit of your story—how did NETWORK come into your heart and your life?

A. It was 1971. Another sister and I were living together in Fort Lauderdale and doing social justice work. She got the invitation to come to a meeting of women religious to consider our role in the political scene in Washington. So we both asked our provincial if we could go. She said yes, and so it went.

After a day-and-a-half of input, I offered the resolution to form a “network” [of Catholic sisters] and volunteered to be on its first steering committee. We came back in January of 1972, and NETWORK began. The consensus was that we needed someone to be in Washington to start this thing.

Q. What were your thoughts and feelings as this was happening so quickly?

A. Well, there was a very strong inner affirmation of NETWORK as an idea, but it was scary because I had a job and was making money for the congregation, and I was living near my widowed mother at the time. There was emotional upheaval, but at the bottom of it I felt called to say yes.

Q. What were the early days like?

A. We were all learners and volunteers. We lived in McKenna House, which was low-income housing. They said NETWORK could stay with them and get free room and board. We hardly had any money, but we had people, a place where we could live. It could be fairly overwhelming at times.

The first summer we wanted to have a legislative seminar. The way that we assembled it was haphazard—“someone who knows someone.” We were a collection of staff and volunteers supported by our religious congregations. We came from all over—even Latin America and Central America. People were working on civil rights, anti-war demonstrations, women’s issues... we were involved all across the spectrum.

We definitely overdid it—too many speakers, too much everything. We would have parties every night and

developed a great sense of solidarity. But, we discovered there really was a great need for the voice of women religious on Capitol Hill.

NETWORK became a magnet for women interested in this kind of systemic change work. They found sisterhood in our gathering. We may have been in the minority in our congregations, but we found community here. Relationship-building is what it was about for me.

There were some legislative victories, but it was a stretch to say we were a big success in moving legislation. But we were a voice.

Q. *I know that ecological justice is very dear to you. Can you tell me how you see the link between ecological and economic justice?*

A. My personal experience came from starting a garden at the NETWORK house. It was a very different way of living when I wasn't doing NETWORK work. I found it was really refreshing to be starting plants and having garden plots. We'd have people come in the summer and make compost and do other garden jobs. It became another community even. It was about growing living things.

With gardening, you weren't fighting a system. In Congress, we may make some improvement, but we were never going to capture the whole Congress. This work was very hands-on and connected with earth.

I think the way organic farmers describe the call is "to give back to earth as much or more than you took from her." That struck me because we are not separate from earth, we are one living system. Ecology itself is looking at the interconnection of all of these systems. Economics is a system. You look at the connection of wealth and power and how the rich just get richer and how those controlling the wealth are a very small minority, and it's easy to see how that system has really contributed to destroying our earth.

All these systems are interrelated. I've been doing a lot of study on permaculture, which looks at all of the interconnections between soil, air, water, the culture and bioregion. You're much more aware of our place on earth as one of its many living members. You're not the top



Carol Coston, OP, at a rally on Capitol Hill in 1983

dog. We've been raised to think we're the apex of the pyramid. Genesis didn't say to go out and dominate the world. We're not the kings and queens here.

I think it's easy to get caught up in the frenzy of Congress. For me, being connected with earth is stabilizing.

Q. *What are your hopes for the papal encyclical coming out this summer?*

A. I hope it will help change attitudes—we must have a change of consciousness, as human beings, as Christians. We have to change our whole consciousness to one that is more centered on ourselves as one of many living species. We're not so important. This whole idea that we have to be number one has shifted. Earth can take care of herself if we leave her alone. This is our call as social-justice Catholics, as socially involved Christians.

People pay attention to what the pope

says. I hope the encyclical points out the connection between greed, overconsumption, lifestyles that aren't in concert with all of creation, and the destruction of earth. If the church can get as energized as it was in 60's and 70's with lay participation and all of that, it could be great. The encyclical should be hopeful and spiritually energizing, calling forth our best selves, not our most competitive. We should go for cooperation instead of competition. We need a different world view, a more inclusive world view, one that is non-abusive, respectful, integrated—that would engender a new attitude.

Congress doesn't want to cut the military budget, and yet we have so much degraded land and water systems. I hope the encyclical is a wake-up call that we are diminishing the wealth of earth.

Q. *How does your personal spirituality fit into your work for justice?*

A. Because I grew up in the South, I was a witness to racial injustice. There were "Colored" and "White" fountains. It didn't seem right, though I didn't have the analysis for it. The whole thing about war in Vietnam, civil rights, women's rights, led me to think that if we're living the values that are within the Catholic social justice tradition, then this is one of the things you're called to—to be doing this type of work. That, then, can be the subject of your prayer, reflection and contemplative practice. We're called to try to bring these things about. What are denounced in the social encyclicals are the unjust systems. What is announced in these writings is another way of being, another way of living together. This is the spirituality I strive for—thinking of myself as part of a much larger community.

Q. *Final thoughts?*

A. I've always been grateful for my experiences at NETWORK. It's still with me. There was such a sense of coming together as a community, of people being concerned about the same things and finding ways to work together to do something about it. I still run into women who went to the NETWORK seminars. It was a wonderful experience of relationship.

Allison Walter is NETWORK's Policy Education Associate.



Pope Francis on Environmental Justice and Inequality

In his upcoming encyclical, Pope Francis will point out how our brothers and sisters at the margins suffer most grievously from our global ecological crises.

We must be diligent about the effects of climate change and ecological degradation in all our communities since they also exacerbate social inequalities already present. Therefore, advocating for environmental justice means addressing environmental racism, food insecurity, and the twin challenges of housing and transportation inequalities. This impacts all aspects of our lives. Let's open our hearts and minds to the pope's message.

Be a witness to Pope Francis's message about the environment and be mindful of your actions on our planet

Make sure you don't miss any updates about the encyclical or the pope's visit to the U.S. this September! Sign up at www.network-education.org/pope to get all the latest news.

Share your story with NETWORK

“ You look at the connection of wealth and power and how the rich just get richer and how those controlling the wealth are a very small minority—and it's easy to see how that system has really contributed to destroying our earth ... We must have a change of consciousness. As human beings, as Christians, we have to change our whole consciousness to one that is more centered on ourselves as one of many living species. ”

—Sister Carol Coston, NETWORK founder and first executive director

Sister Carol Coston encourages us to see the interconnections between economic justice and ecology, and she lives out her commitment through her work in organic farming and in other ways. Many of us have also recognized the call to stand for environmental justice. Tell us how you are leading or are part of the movement for environmental justice in your own community.

Please email your stories to info@networklobby.org

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this fact sheet.



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In the coming months, our look—including our website, social media and the *Connection* format—will be updated to reflect a more modern look. Your feedback below will help guide our efforts. Please return this page using the envelope in the center of this magazine or complete it online at www.networklobby.org/survey, being sure to include your member code located by your address to the right. Thank you!



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