



November 14, 2022

In joy and hope, the Congregation of the Humility of Mary shares our commitment to a seven-year journey toward integral ecology as part of the Laudato Si' Action Platform. Responding to the call of Pope Francis in Laudato Si', we recognize the urgency to act as our world faces the reality of the climate crisis. From our place of privilege, we resolve to do our part in creating a more sustainable and equitable environment. Our mission statement calls us "to work for justice within the human family and to care for Earth itself." Our call to live in the example of the humility of Mary is also integrally tied to care of Earth. The very word humble comes from "humus" meaning earth or ground. We recognize all of life as sacred and intimately connected as God's creation.

Following a year of preparation and reflection, we now commit to our initial Laudato Si' Action Plan.

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The CHM Care of Earth Journey

Over a period of months, “The CHM Care of Earth Journey” appeared in the community monthly mailing. As the CHM community prepared to commit to a Laudato Si’ Action Plan, all were invited to reflect on each of the seven Laudato Si’ Goals and how the community had already been working on these goals.

Goal #1: Response to the Cry of the Earth

The Response to the Cry of the Earth is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability. Actions could include the adoption of renewable energies and achieving carbon neutrality.

There are many examples of this goal in action at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat:

- Current use of solar panels, with plans for additional solar panels
- Restoration of the native tallgrass prairie
- Involvement of advisory committee members and others with professional knowledge of ecology
- Placement of 83 acres adjacent to the Wapsipinicon River in a conservation easement, prior to selling it in 2020
- Development of a new forest management plan

“Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift we have freely received and must share with others.” (LS 159).



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Goal #2: Response to the Cry of the Poor

The Response to the Cry of the Poor is a call to promote eco-justice, aware that we are called to defend all forms of life on Earth. Actions could include projects to promote solidarity, with special attention given to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, refugees, migrants, and children at risk.

Examples of how the CHM community puts this goal into action are:

- Ministry with immigrants and refugees in Iowa in Ottumwa, Davenport and Mt. Pleasant and also in Denver, CO
- Financial support of organizations providing services for immigrants and refugees
 - Rocky Mountain Immigration Advocacy Network—Westminister, CO
 - Diversity Service Center of Iowa—Muscatine, Iowa
 - World Relief of Quad Cities—Moline, Illinois
- Membership in the Quad Cities Sanctuary Coalition
- Affirmation of the CHM Statement on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, 2018

“Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered.”

Laudato Si’ 70



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Goal #3: Ecological Economics

Ecological Economics acknowledges that the economy is a sub-system of human society, which itself is embedded within our common home. Actions could include sustainable production and consumption, divestment from fossil fuels and any activity harmful to the planet and the people.

There are many examples of how CHM sisters, associates and staff put this goal into action:

- Socially responsible investing by the congregation with limited stock held in fossil fuel companies
- Emphasis on simplicity and sustainable consumption
 - Recycling whenever possible
 - Fresh produce, composting and rain barrels at The Prairie
 - Christmas gift swap at Humility of Mary Center
 - Donation of personal belongings to various organizations
 - Purchase of items from consignment and second hand shops
 - Continuing to use items rather than upgrading to the newest model
- Use of hybrid and electric vehicles, with an electric vehicle charging station at Humility of Mary Center (HMC)

“Purchasing is always a moral - and not simply economic - act. Today in a word, “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle.” (Laudato Si’ 206)



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Goal #4: Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles

The Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles is grounded in the idea of sufficiency, and the mindful use of resources and energy. Actions could include reducing waste and recycling, opting for a more plant-based diet and reducing meat consumption, and avoiding single use items.

Examples of how the CHM community puts this goal into action are:

- From the days of our founding, CHMs have made a habit of conserving paper
 - Fr. Begel wrote on scraps of paper which are in the archives at Villa Maria
 - Today's practice of printing on both sides of paper and using scrap paper
 - Today's technology allows us to read on an electronic device rather than printing
- Vegetable gardens at the Humility of Mary Center and The Prairie
- Working to reduce food waste and composting
- Some sisters and associates choose not to eat beef, or meat in general.
- Adjusting thermostats to conserve energy
- Avoiding use of plastic water bottles (these are not available at HMC).

Today, in a word, "the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle". (LS #206)



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Goal #5: Ecological Education

Ecological Education is about re-thinking and re-designing curricular and institutional reform in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action. Actions could include ensuring equitable access to education for all and promoting human rights, and ecological restoration activities.

There are many examples of how the CHM community has participated in ecological education.

- Promoting human rights by being involved in anti-human trafficking efforts, as well as solidarity with immigrants
- CHM sponsorship of the Earth Charter Summit at St. Ambrose University
- S. Cathleen Real's environmental educational training with Senator Al Gore
- Hosting speakers at Humility of Mary Center such as ecologist Connie Mutel
- Care of Earth focused programs and retreats at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat

Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us."

(LS #211)



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Goal #6: Ecological Spirituality

Ecological Spirituality recovers a religious vision of God's creation and encourages greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy and gratitude. Actions could include promoting creation-centered liturgical celebrations and retreats and praying in nature.

Examples of how the CHM community puts this goal into action are:

- Many in the CHM community spend time in prayer experiencing the wonder of creation on a regular basis. The Humility of Mary Center is one setting where this occurs, with the courtyard and nearby wooded area.
- There have been various communal prayer experiences celebrating God's creation.
- Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat offers many retreats and programs where participants are immersed in the beauty of the natural world. A recent example is an opportunity to learn about and enjoy the night sky. Also scheduled in May is a Facebook live tour of the beehives at The Prairie.

"The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things." (LS #233)

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Goal #7: Community Resilience and Empowerment

Community resilience and empowerment envisage a synodal journey of community engagement and participatory action at various levels. Actions could include promoting advocacy and developing people's campaigns, encouraging rootedness and a sense of belonging in local communities and neighborhood ecosystems.

There are many examples of how the CHM community has participated in community engagement and participatory action.

- The congregation financially supports Iowa Interfaith Power and Light. IIPL is a faith-based organization involved in advocacy, supporting action to address the climate crisis.
- Individuals in the community do their own advocacy to address the climate crisis, through supporting particular legislation and through their voting practices.
- The CHMs have a long history of engagement in the Central Community Circle neighborhood of Davenport. Within this neighborhood is the HHSI overnight shelter. Also, CHMs have been involved with Project Renewal, which offers after school and summer programs for youth, many who are affected by poverty and exposure to violence.
- In the fall of 2021, a number of Davenport CHMs attended meetings in opposition to building a new, large youth detention center in the CCC neighborhood.

Along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us.
(LS #231)

