

# CARE FOR OUR COMMON



TOUCH THE EARTH  
WITH GENTLENESS

*Sisters for Justice  
Johannesburg*

## OVERALL PLAN

AT THE ENTRANCE	INTRODUCTION - CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME	
1.	WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME?	
2.	THE GOSPEL OF CREATION	
3.	THE HUMANROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS	
4.	INTEGRAL ECOLOGY – caring for the common good	
5.	DIALOGUE	
6.	ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY	
AT THE CONCLUSION	OUR NEXT STEP	

## **INTRODUCTION**

TODAY we celebrate Heritage Day on this Heritage Site. We have chosen to honour our COMMON HOME, the earth, in a special way on this day. To do this we are using ideas from the recently published letter written by Pope Francis to ALL PEOPLE around the globe, inviting a dialogue on CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME. The official title of the Pope's letter is LAUDATO SI' (Praise be to you, my Lord), the first words of the beautiful canticle his namesake, Francis of Assisi, wrote in honour of all creatures and creation, way back in the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century. This song is also known as the Canticum of the Sun, or the Canticum of all Creatures.

We know that today our planet earth is under siege, as a result of its mistreatment by us human beings. Pope Francis reminds us throughout his long letter, Laudato Si', that people made poor by life's circumstances around the planet are suffering the most because of what we are doing to planet earth. He also frequently alludes to the interconnection of all things and that while time is running out, many individuals, groups and movements have come into existence to take better care of this earth, our home, entrusted to us and to our care. This is a sign of great hope for us.

As we walk the Koppies this morning, we will be prompted to stop at SIX places: to pause, listen, look around us, reflect and hopefully be inspired to take a step, maybe in a different direction, and do our bit to make amends for the destruction that has already taken place. It is our hope that the thoughts that will arise in each of us on this short pilgrimage across one of our city's treasured 'open spaces' will be shared with others after the walk is over, and will add to the ferment for good and for change that is rising up around this planet earth.

Melville Koppies is an appropriate place for this reflective walk. In centuries past it provided a home to human beings whose footsteps on the earth left less of an imprint than ours do. Today it is a place of conservation and gentle recreation. On Sundays groups of Believers gather in various nooks and crannies, and it becomes their place of worship for a short space of time. As we traverse a section of it this morning, we bless it with our presence and energy, and receive from it the blessings our precious earth home is always generously pouring out on all the creatures who inhabit it.

**Sisters for Justice**

**Johannesburg, September 2015**

## **Chapter One: What is happening to our Common Home?**

We are in a time of rapid change which is not always geared to the common good or to sustainable human development – a lot of the change causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity.

Not enough thought is being given to models of production that are capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting the use of non-renewable resources, reusing and recycling. We are challenged to find more ways of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet. (22)

Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply. (28)

The loss of forests and woodlands is leading to the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses ... (32) The many different species are not only valuable “resources”, they have value in themselves. ... because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us.(33)

Genuine relationships with others are often replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at a whim.

A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (49)

We are one single human family, there are no frontiers or barriers, political or social behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.

Let us take time to consider what it would mean for us in this context to:

Live wisely,  
Think deeply,  
Love generously.



We are one family...

## Station Two: 'The Gospel of Creation'

'God saw everything that God had made,  
and behold it was *very good* (Gen 1:31).'

'All living beings by mere existence bless God and give him glory'

Each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous.  
Even the fleeting life of the least of beings  
in its few seconds of existence  
is enfolded in God's affection.

Creation is of the order of love.  
God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things.  
Soil, water, mountains, everything is, as it were, a caress of God  
(*'the love which moves the sun and the stars'*).

Nature not only manifests God but is also a locus of God's presence.  
From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form,  
nature is a continuing revelation of the divine.

A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real  
if our hearts lack tenderness,  
compassion and  
concern for our fellow human beings.

Peace,  
justice and  
the preservation of creation  
are three absolutely interconnected themes.

A litany of thanksgiving recalling the gifts of creation in South Africa

...Response to each: 'O Love which moves the sun and the stars.'



### STATION THREE: The human roots of the ecological crisis...



Reflect on technology, use and throw away mentality, leading to dominance, exploitation, abandonment slavery, drugs and trafficking, waste...

Integral ecology “needs to take account of the value of labour” (124). Everyone must be able to have work, because it is “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (128), In order that everyone can really benefit from economic freedom, “restraints occasionally have to be imposed on those possessing greater resources and financial power” (129).

#### PRAYER-POEM

And as I wait

And watch red-light;  
The danger sign  
For movement forward,  
I can touch  
Your outstretched  
beggar’s hand and  
feed it  
With a coin or note,  
Or just with bread  
Of Love.  
I can see you



In the Light

And lift you up  
With my arms of sorrow  
With my heart of joy  
I can embrace you in the Cosmic Consciousness





## **STATION FOUR: Integral Ecology – Caring for the Common Good**

When we speak of the “environment” what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it (139). Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live.

We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. It requires an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature. We use our environment as a way of expressing our identity. A wholesome social life can light up a seemingly undesirable environment. On the other hand extreme poverty experienced in areas lacking harmony, open space or potential for integration, can lead to incidents of brutality and to exploitation.

Two local examples: – in Hillbrow recently we have the dreaded ‘Red Ants’ evicting people from their homes, children left in the winter cold. On the other side of Hillbrow, over a number of years, residents have worked together to clean up the area of both gangs and of litter. These streets have become havens where children can play safely and people care for one another. Pope Francis insists “that love always proves more powerful” (149).

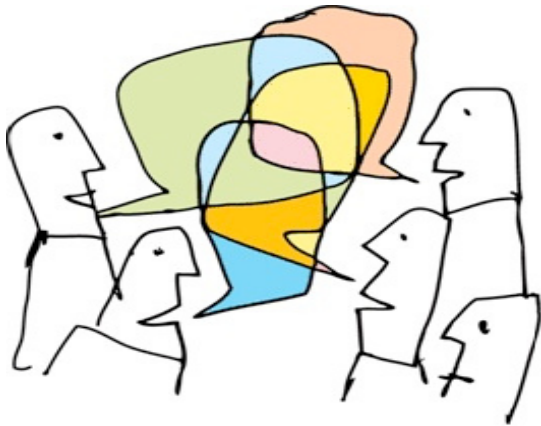


This experience of a communitarian salvation often generates creative ideas for the improvement of a building or a neighbourhood.  
How can we support such efforts?

O God of love, enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out.....

Amen

## STATION FIVE: Lines of Approach and Action



The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of **dialogue** which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas”. (201)

While some are concerned only with financial gain, and others with holding on to or increasing their power, what we are left with are conflicts or spurious agreements where the last thing either party is concerned about is caring for the environment and protecting those who are most vulnerable. Here too, we see how true it is that “**unity** is greater than conflict”. (198)

### Think Globally ACT locally

Religious dialogue    Water  
Production processes  
Air

Animals    Civil Society

Work Place  
NGO

Humans/poor  
Professional  
Disciplines Interactive

Food



In threes/twos little chat ... to & for little action ...SING    *Touch the earth with gentleness ... Touch the earth with love ... touch her with a future by the way you live today .. God has given us the power to create the world anew, if we touch the Earth together, me and you ...*



## **STATION SIX: Ecological Education and Spirituality**

We read in the Gospel that not one of the birds of the air is forgotten by God, even the hairs on your head have been counted. (Lk 12:6 / 221)

### **Reflection**

What does this say to me?

What does it say of how great and intimate is God's care for all creatures?

How then can I mistreat the birds?

How then can I harm myself and others?

Let us ask forgiveness for...

... each time we have abused ourselves and creation

... each time we have separated ourselves, our spirits and our bodies from the oneness of all

... each time we have not remembered our true worth and beauty

... each time we have not released our goodness

... each time we have not lived humbly and gratefully

... each time we have made short sighted and selfish choices

... each time we have abandoned our true heritage

### **Prayer:**

Lord of all,

We pray for peace in ourselves.

We pray to see again with new eyes.

We pray that we may surrender and let our inner goodness emerge.

Let us become,

O Holy One, generous care-givers, tender lovers, hope inspired, joy filled brothers and sisters, remembering that we have not been abandoned, and that you have united yourself to us forever and promised: "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev 21) Amen.



## ***OUR NEXT STEP***

Let us pause to reflect on all we have seen and heard this morning.

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Although there has been much that has troubled us, there is much that gives us joy and hope and together we pray:

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth.

O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

Praise be to you!



Then the Spirit said:  
“Let life entwine the land and sea  
In the web of its community.  
Let its power move human hearts  
To mend the world they’ve torn apart,  
And sing with every leaf and stone  
This is our Earth. This is our home”