



Transformation

RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE

AUG-SEP-OCT 2004

Vol. 6, No. 4

THE EARTH CHARTER: A COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWING THE SACRED BALANCE

Taken from Scarborough Missions Magazine, April 2004 issue. Used with permission.

"We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life and to future generations."

Preamble of The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is the product of nearly a decade of worldwide, cross-cultural conversations aimed at finding a common set of values and principles for creating a truly sustainable human society. For peoples of different faiths and cultures, the Charter can serve as a wonderful starting point to reflect together on the ethical vision needed to renew the sacred balance of our planet.

Throughout the text of the Charter, the call to respect nature is united with the call for justice. To end ecological devastation, we must also work for a better distribution of wealth, human rights and authentic social participation. In particular, the small minority of humanity that consumes the majority of the Earth's gifts must change their way of life so that all creatures—and all people—may flourish.

The Charter puts forth a powerful challenge to all of humanity to choose a new way of living in the world: (see reverse)

Key Principles of the Earth Charter

1. We must respect and care for the community of life by
 - Recognizing that all living beings are of value and that all are interdependent.
 - Affirming that with increased knowledge and power comes increased responsibility for the common good.
 - Ensuring the participation of all in society and the respect for human rights.
 - Taking care to protect the beauty and bounty of the Earth for future generations.
2. We must protect and restore the Earth's ecological systems by:
 - Safeguarding endangered species and caring for the Earth's water, soil, air, forests and oceans.
 - Exercising precaution, discerning the potential impact of our actions to ensure that they will not be harmful.
 - Adopting lifestyles that emphasize quality of life while minimizing consumption.
 - Recognizing and preserving the traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual wisdom of all cultures. (see reverse)



**Grandfather,
Great Spirit,**

once more behold me on earth and lean to hear my feeble voice.

You lived first, and you are older than all need, older than all prayer...

All things belong to you - the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the wings of the air and all green things that live.

You have set the powers of the four quarters to cross each other.

The good road and road of difficulties you have made to cross; and where they cross, the place is holy.

...From the west, you have given me the cup of living water and the sacred bow, the power to make live and to destroy.

You have given me a sacred wind and the herb the cleansing power and the healing.

The daybreak star and the pipe, you have given from the east; and from the south, the nation's sacred hoop and the tree that was to bloom.

...With tears running, O Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather - with running tears I must say now that the tree has never bloomed.

A pitiful old man, you see me here, and I have fallen away and have done nothing. ...here, old, I stand, and the tree is withered, Grandfather, my Grandfather!

Again, and maybe the last time on this earth, I recall the great vision you sent me.

It may be that some little root of the sacred tree still lives.

Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom and fill with singing birds.

Hear me, not for myself, but for my people; I am old.

Hear me that they may once more go back into the sacred hoop and find the good red road, the shielding tree! Hear me in my sorrow, for I may never call again. O make my people live!



Black Elk, Oglala Sioux. 1930
From <http://p199.ezboard.com/fchurchofthespiritfrm9.showMessage?topicID=5.topic> as a submission to a discussion by Kim (Moshmom)

"The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more... This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life."

History of the Earth Charter

In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development proposed the creation of a new charter or universal declaration on ecological protection and sustainable development that would "prescribe new norms for state and interstate behavior needed to maintain livelihoods and life on our shared planet." The 1992 Rio Earth Summit attempted to do this, but fell short of the aspirations that many people had.

In 1994, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev together with the Rio Earth Summit's Secretary General Maurice Strong started a new "people's initiative." An Earth Charter Commission was formed in 1997 to oversee the project and a Secretariat for the Commission was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica. In March 1997, the Commission produced the first version of a Benchmark Draft and finalized the text in March 2000 after gathering input and ideas from around the world.

The Earth Charter is an excellent tool for inter-faith dialogue. Persons of different faiths can share how their religious traditions reinforce, complement and deepen the ethical values needed to create a truly just and sustainable Earth community.

Key Principles, continued...

3. We must promote social and economic justice by:

- Eradicating poverty, guaranteeing access to the essentials of life and ensuring a sustainable livelihood for all people.
- Distributing wealth equitably, canceling onerous debts and ensuring fair trade.
- Affirming gender equality and promoting the participation of women in all aspects of society.
- Eliminating discrimination in all its forms, recognizing aboriginal rights and honoring the role of youth.

4. We must build a global society based on democracy, nonviolence and peace by:

- Strengthening democratic institutions, supporting civil society and protecting human rights.
- Promoting education and life-long learning aimed at teaching a sustainable way of life.
- Treating all living beings with respect and consideration.
- Nurturing a culture that values and celebrates diversity, nonviolence and peace.

RFC Regional Workshops 2004-2005

A MOVEMENT IN HOPE: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Oct. 1-2, 2004—Mary Ellen Sheehan IHM—Valley City ND
 Oct. 8-9, 2004— Donald Senior CP—Racine WI
 Oct. 29-30, 2004—Janet Ruffing RSM in Framingham MA

Day 1 for Leaders/Formators

Day 2 for all members of congregations, associates.

Information on website:

http://www.relforcon.org/5_wkshops/5_2004workshops.htm
 or from the national office (contact information below)

SITES TO SURF

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life—issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs
<http://pewforum.org/?source=grnews>

Mexican American Cultural Center
 Programs for multiculturalism, diversity
www.maccsa.org

A GOOD READ

Davis OSB, Cyrian and Jamie Phelps OP, eds. Stamped with the Image of God: African Americans as God's Image in Black, Orbis Press, 2004.

Fialka, John J. Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America. St. Martin's Griffin, 2004.

To find out more about the Charter, visit www.earthcharter.org. The site also contains a large number of resources. Or contact Earth Charter USA,, 2100 "L" Street NW, Washington, DC, 20037, USA. Tel: 202-778-6133.