



# Franciscan CONNECTIONS

Fall 2019

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## DBQ Franciscans Affirm Corporate Stance for the Earth

By Sister Michelle Balek, OSF

As we enter autumn, there are many signs that Mother Nature gives to alert us to the change in seasons. In response, we pull out our sweaters and do other tasks to ready ourselves to meet the cooler days and the earlier darkness. Our society gives off many signs, too, of urgent needs and injustices. A Corporate Stance is a public statement or action made by the congregation and/or associates to address an issue of human concern, social impact, or structural injustice in society or church. This is one way we join our individual voices and actions together to place greater focus and communal efforts on a current issue. The procedure of coming to such action necessitates study of the issue and prayerful discerning of our response based in Gospel values and who we are as Franciscans, encouraging each sister and/or associate to make a personal supportive action in response. Since 1983, the Dubuque Franciscans have enacted five corporate stances, each responds to a unique sign of the time. The most recent corporate stance was the Earth Charter, which was initiated by **Sisters Meg Gemar, Marge Staudt, Marie Cigrand, Michelle Balek** and affirmed by the congregation in July 2019.

### History/Background

April 22, 1970 marked the first Earth Day in the U.S. There was a growing awareness around the world, of the detrimental effects our human impact was creating on the environment and how little these issues were being addressed in the political and media spheres. With this heightened awareness the U.S. established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in December of 1970. Just two years later the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was established as well as the Clean Water Act in the U.S. In 1987 the United Nations (UN) World Commission on Environment and Development called for the creation of a new charter in response to the multiple global



Sisters and Associates pray a silent blessing during a gathering in Dubuque for more than 20 billboards with the message "Standing with Pope Francis; Caring for Our Common Home" placed by women religious in strategic locations throughout Iowa, southwest Wisconsin and western Illinois in 2016. Photo by Jessi Russo.

environmental challenges. The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) known as the Rio Earth Summit was an attempt to garner collaboration among member states in sustainability and development efforts. It also provided for large scale public participation. Grassroots organizations from across the globe attended outside the official meetings, pressing for sustainability, equity and more public participation.

It was at the Rio Summit where the drafting of an Earth Charter was launched. Consultations were held globally, from 1995 to 2000 involving diverse regions of the world, a wide variety of organizations and individuals from all walks of life and faith backgrounds. The Earth Charter Commission worked on drafts during this time and began distributing them in 1997 to interested groups, incorporating their feedback. The final version was approved in Paris in March of 2000, and a process was launched for individuals, organizations, and governments at all levels to endorse it.

During this time, the Dubuque Franciscans also were growing in awareness of environmental issues and our call to care for creation. We have always

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had a committee to assist the congregation in addressing these creation care issues. In 1998 we composed

and affirmed Our Covenant with Creation. In 2005 we began studying the Earth Charter and its congruence with Franciscan values. From that study eventually was born the Sister Water Project, though as a congregation we had not officially endorsed the Earth Charter. In 2015 Pope Francis promulgated his influential encyclical *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home* in response to the critical environmental and social issues, inviting all people to dialogue and action. A year later, the Dubuque Franciscans promulgated their Land Ethic.

The rationale written for the Dubuque Franciscans' Corporate Stance this year outlines the current situation and the urgency of responding.

The whole Earth community is experiencing even more peril. The latest National Climate Assessment, released November 23, 2018 by the US Global Research Program, outlines severe consequences of rapidly rising global temperatures to all areas of our lives: our health, the economy, the environment, and infrastructure. The United Nations has warned that we have 12 years in which to limit climate change catastrophe.

The daily news illustrates our current national situation with its constant assault on the environment, democratic institutions, and the very social fabric of our country: rollbacks of environmental protection policies, inhumane treatment of immigrants, the sharp decline in civil discourse, abandoning our global commitments, a growing economic disparity, the erosion of institutions that safeguard democracy, the rise of white supremacy and hate groups. These national assaults are mirrored in many countries across the globe. Our Earth Community is crying out for compassionate responses.

The Earth Charter encompasses Gospel and Franciscan values as well as our congregation's commitment areas, articulating them in today's terms. It is more important than ever to give witness

## Earth Charter - 2019

*We, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family, committed to live in right relationship with all creation, take a corporate stance to endorse, promote and implement the Earth Charter's vision, principles and values in how we live, pray, and minister, and in our advocacy for public policy.*

to the vision, principles, and values of the Earth Charter as a positive alternative, finding ways to take action as a congregation and in collaboration

with others to create a more just and sustainable world. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls us to live an "integral ecology" and reminds us that: "...we have to realize that 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." As Francis of Assisi related to all as brother and sister, we too are called to live this familial model of kinship in our time and place. The Earth Charter provides a framework to focus our compassionate responses to the cry of our Earth Community.

**Sister Theresa Jungers** takes an active role at Mount St. Francis in living out this stance. "As I continue to live into the values and principles of the Earth Charter, I am supported through the educational and action-oriented efforts of the Mount St. Francis Green Team, of which I am a member. I believe that every action taken to respect the earth and to care for the community of life is my way to participate in the creation of a sustainable global society, for future generations."

**Sister Meg Gemar**, one of the initiators of the stance, sees its importance in unifying all three of the congregation's commitment areas in this stance. In recounting the current world situation, she finds her motivation to be involved as she recounts: "More storms are more severe and drastic. Plant and animal species as well as humans are losing their habitats and life requirements every day. The world still overlooks the poor and vulnerable, doesn't want to help the refugees who are trying to escape violence, wars, hopeless situations and who are looking for a place to find a decent living. We are still trying to overcome racism, sexism, trafficking of animals, plants and humans, unfair wages, and gun violence. This is why I was willing to work on the corporate stance we took on the Earth, and it is what gives me hope for the future." ■

## Preamble to the Earth Charter

*The preamble to the Earth Charter succinctly outlines the urgency of taking action: "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."*

## Check the Health of Your Estate Plan

By Sister Cathy (Kate) Katoski, OSF

Already have an estate plan? Does it cover everything you need it to? Evaluate your current estate plan with the questions below and add up your points. How do you score? If you don't already have a plan, see what you can accomplish by taking time to plan your future...today.

**1. Do you have a will or living trust drafted by a qualified estate planning attorney?**

*I have either document. (+10 points)*

**2. Do you review and update your will every few years?**

*Yes, I do. (+5 points)*

**3. Have you named an executor in your will and notified that person?**

*Yes, I have. (+3 points)*

**4. Is your life insurance adequate for you and your family's needs? Are the beneficiary designations up to date?**

*I have reviewed my coverage in the past five years. (+5 points)*

**5. Do you have beneficiaries who require special care?**

*I have not made arrangements for their well-being. (-5 points)*

**6. Have you established a durable power of attorney in case you become incapacitated?**

*Yes, I have. (+5 points)*

**7. Do you have a living will or health care power of attorney?**

*I have either document in effect. (+5 points)*

Include the Dubuque Franciscans in your future plans! In addition to supporting loved ones, you can use your estate plan to make a difference for the causes you care about. Contact Sister Cathy Katoski at [katoskic@osfdbq.org](mailto:katoskic@osfdbq.org) or 563-583-9786 to learn how you can include the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa in your estate plan today. ■

**8. Does your will name a guardian for any minor children you may have?**

*Yes, it does. (+5 points)*

**9. Do you have a pet or farm animals? Have you made arrangements for their care if something were to happen to you?**

*No, I have not made arrangements. (-5 points)*

**10. Have you made any provisions for your favorite charitable organizations?**

*Yes, I have. (+5 points)*

**Total Score:**

**35 to 43 points:** Nice job! Your estate plan is in excellent condition. Make sure it stays that way by reviewing your plans regularly and after major life changes.

**25 to 34 points:** Consider your plans to be in fair condition. Set aside an afternoon to more thoroughly assess your plans, then contact an estate planning professional if you need help organizing and updating.

**24 points or less:** It's time to see an estate planning professional to make sure your plans are designed to protect the people and causes you care about most, or to get started.

## Dubuque Franciscan Associates Work Together to Finish Labyrinth at Lila Mae's House in Sioux City

Dubuque Franciscan Associates volunteered their time and talent May 31-June 4 at Lila Mae's House, a transitional home for victims of sex trafficking in Sioux City, Iowa, launched by **Sister Shirley Fineran**.

The Associates worked on a variety of tasks at the home, one of which was completing a labyrinth on the grounds.

Franciscan Associates have been collecting funds over the past year to secure the materials for the labyrinth.

"Thank you to the Dubuque Franciscan Associates

for helping make Lila Mae's come to life!" said Sister Shirley.

Lila Mae's, which opened its doors in November, is a place of healing, safety, and wholeness for seven women. ■



*The labyrinth at Lila Mae's House in Sioux City, Iowa. Contributed photo.*



Wishing you a holiday season full of deep hope and simple joys!

### Sisters of St. Francis Dubuque, IA

3390 Windsor Avenue • Dubuque, IA  
52001 • (563) 583-9786 •  
fax (563) 583-3250 • [www.osfdbq.org](http://www.osfdbq.org)

Email: [development@osfdbq.org](mailto:development@osfdbq.org)  
Editor: Jessi Russo

Director of Development:  
Sr. Cathy Katoski, OSF

#### Mission Statement of the Dubuque Franciscans

Rooted in the Gospel and in the spirit of Francis and Clare, the Sisters of St. Francis live in right relationship with all creation.



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## Nine Franciscan Associates Commissioned

On Sunday, September 22, the Dubuque Franciscans commissioned nine new Associates, who completed the two-year Franciscan Way of Life (FWL) process.

Linda Crisman reflected on her path to becoming an associate.

"Family has always been important to me. I feel honored and blessed to have journeyed for two years with my family of FWL candidates. Now because of this teamwork and engagement, I am excited to be a part of the larger Franciscan family and the opportunities it will bring to make a difference."

In her reflection on the readings, **Sister Kathy Knipper** challenged the assembly to make such a difference when she asked, "And so my Sisters and Franciscan Associates, are we willing as individuals and collectively as community to be in relationship, work for justice, be honest in things great and small, and encounter the least among us, all in the name of faith and love? The call to conversion for the sake of transforming the world in the name of love is ours."

Associate Director Lisa Schmidt had met with each of the candidates as they completed the FWL and was impressed by each: "They are committed to the Franciscan Way of Life, and it was a privilege to get to know them. They have a passion for social justice and carrying out the Franciscan values." ■



Front row (seated) left to right: Lori Pottebaum, Judy Gansemer, and Beth Oppelt. Back row left to right: Pat Wiss, Mark Johnson, Linda Crisman, Eunice Enk, Jane and Dave Heiar. Photo by Sister Phyllis Manternach.