



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Sustainability

February 2020

Introduction*

Sustainability is the capacity for the biosphere and the human civilization to coexist, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It has three main pillars: economic, environmental and social – informally referred to as profits, planet and people.

Earth is an amazing gift of God. We strive to grow in our appreciation of this fact and realize the wonder and mystery of the interconnectedness of all of life. But the present moment is marked by a strange paradox: the more we gaze in wonder at Earth, the more we realize that human actions are ravaging and depleting the natural world. The only way to restore and maintain the health of Earth is to reduce the human impact on the environment. This requires a serious evaluation of our lifestyles and our patterns of consumption.

Call to prayer*

Creator God, we can choose to live differently. Inspire us as we make choices so that we will recognize the impact our lives have on our environment and our human family around the globe. Help us choose to live in a way that creates a better world for everyone.

Experience

Creating economic growth just by increasing consumption of material goods is no longer a viable option at the global level. Projections indicate that the global use of materials is set to almost double between 2017 and 2060 with corresponding increased levels of greenhouse gas emissions and other toxic effects such as those from mining and other pollution sources.

The present model of development has delivered prosperity to many, but it has also led to unprecedented levels of inequality that undermine innovation, social cohesion and sustainable economic growth. It has brought the world close to tipping points with the global climate system and biodiversity loss. To change course, scientists say the world must transform a number of key areas of human activity, including food, energy, consumption and production, and cities.

The food system must undergo widespread changes to the infrastructure, cultural and societal norms, and policies that are supporting the current unsustainable status quo. At present, approximately two billion people suffer from food insecurity and 820 million are undernourished. At the same time, overweight rates are growing in almost all regions of the world, with global numbers reaching 2 billion overweight adults and 40 million children under the age of five.

Countries must reduce the environmental impact of their food production systems by reducing food waste and reducing reliance on animal-based protein sources.

The energy system must also transform to close the energy access gap. Close to a billion people are without access to electricity, and more than three billion people rely on polluting solid fuels for cooking. These gaps must be addressed while at the same time increasing energy efficiency and phasing out fossil-based power generation.

Achieving sustainable development in other areas will require more compact and efficient cities that are better served by quality public transport and other infrastructure, social services, and an economy that provides decent and sustainable livelihoods including those enabled by technology and nature-based industries. The global environmental commons – such as the atmosphere, oceans, and rainforests – must also be safeguarded as crucial sources of ecosystem services and natural resources.

Source: [Scientists call for urgent, targeted action to avoid reversing the development gains of recent decades](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/), 11 September 2019, New York (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>)

Reflection

Because the earth and its resources are God's gift to all humanity, we are reverent, just, and sparing in our use of created things, concerned for the needs of present and future generations. ... We reflect this simplicity especially in our convent homes, food, clothing, purchases, travel, and recreation. (*You Are Sent, General Directory 19a and 20a*)

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. (*Laudato Si'* 207 quoting *The Earth Charter*, 29 June 2000)

How do these two quotes call you to greater focus on sustainability?

Action

Google "ways to live sustainably" for any number of websites offering suggestions. Some examples:

- Reduce household energy use by turning off lights when you are not using them or setting your thermostat a little lower in the winter and wearing a sweater.
- Recycle as much as possible.
- Avoid single-use products: cups, bags, food storage containers, etc.
- Use refillable water bottles.
- Compost food scraps when possible.
- Purchase fair-trade products when possible.
- What else can you do?

Closing prayer*

God of grace and love, we bring our prayers, our commitment, our gifts to you this day. Let us who have an awareness of your creation and all that it brings to the human family have the courage and conviction that we are able to contribute to the sustainability of Earth. May each of our actions reveal our awareness that we are partners with you in the creation and sustainability of this Earth that you have given to us to appreciate and enjoy.

*Source for the prayers: *Prayer for Sustainability of the Earth*, [Catholic Health Association of the United States](#) (pdf)

Prepared by Sister Jeanne Wingenter from the Central Pacific Province (CP), for the International Shalom Office, Rome, Italy
Graphic from the Directional Statement, 24th General Chapter. Design: Congregational Communications Office.