Theological Reflection
THE EARTH CHARTER

PREAMBLE

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.

STEP I. INSERTION/ CONTACT

What is happening?
Spend quality time (say a week) to get yourself connected with the Earth and its community of life. You could engage with the suggested activities/ experiences or do what would best helps you to experience your communion with the earth community.

Suggested activities: For communion
1. Spend some time each day in the midst of nature just allowing the various gifts of mother earth to draw you to themselves. You may simply remain in silent communion or touch a flower, embrace a tree
my body letting energy flow from and to each other, communicate with a bird, plant, animal, insect..., walk barefoot feeling the touch of earth etc.

2. Stand barefoot with your feet firmly planted on the earth. Notice the way the earth supports your entire body. As you ground your body and experience your rootedness in the earth, become aware of your body as earth waking to consciousness. Ask: How do I experience myself rooted in the earth? How do I experience as earth?

3. Meditation:
Lie around a tree with the feet towards the trunk, or sit under a tree. Gently close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing. Slowly breathe in. Feel the air entering your nostrils and traveling slowly down your windpipe to fill your lungs.... slowly breathe out.
Now use your imagination to follow your breath down your windpipe into your lungs. Imagine all the tiny blood vessels throughout your lungs drawing in the oxygen from the air. Imagine the blood carrying the oxygen flow to all the parts of the body. Became aware of the blood returning again to your lungs, ready to pass the carbon dioxide it has gathered back into your breath to be exhaled. Think of the oxygen rich air you are breathing in, and of the carbon dioxide-rich air you are breathing out.
As you breathe in imagine the oxygen rich air you are breathing in as coming from a tree you are lying or sitting under. As you breathe out imagine the carbon dioxide rich air that has passed through your body slipping joyously into the green chlorophyll of a leaf on the tree. Imagine the carbon dioxide in the air that was once your breath transformed into oxygen again in the leaves of the tree and coming out again into the atmosphere. Let your breathing allow you to feel
your interconnectedness with the tree. Feel you connection with the air in the atmosphere. Adapted from: Training for Transformation, Journal what stirred within you during your time of communion.

Activities to experience our sense of disconnectedness
1. At the end of the day look around your house and see the non biodegradable, non recyclable waste generated by you. Look at all the electrical and electronic gadgets used by you, the source of your energy, the type of appliances used.
2. Go around your towns and cities and notice the unplanned, non-sustainable development, the abuse and wastage of natural resources, smell the polluted air, see the polluted rivers and water bodies. Go to the countryside, the villages and see the depletion of natural resources, the deforestation, cutting of hills and mountains, agricultural land lying barren or converted to housing, mining and other industrial activities.
3. Watch the DVD “An Inconvenient Truth” if you have one.

Having done the above sit in stillness becoming aware of the inner stirrings within you. In what way have you disconnected yourself from the earth and its community of life?
Journal your experience.

Group Sharing:
You are encouraged to have the sharing outdoors in the midst of nature where possible
Prepare a sacred space that depicts your connectedness and disconnectedness with the Earth.
Begin with a chant
Read the Preamble of the Earth Charter
Share your experience of connectedness / communion with the earth
and also your experience of being disconnected.

STEP II. ANALYSIS

Why is this happening?

The Global Situation (The Earth Charter)

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable

Guidelines for Analysis

Make a study of the following in your local area (village, city, state):
Take up areas that are relevant to your situation and look at the causes and its effects on the earth and its environment.
  o How the biodiversity and the natural heritage is threatened.
  o Endangered species and ecosystems.
  o Non-native and genetically modified organisms and plants.
  o Extraction and use of non-renewable resources.
  o Developmental initiatives like housing, mega projects, transport facilities, tourism etc.
Development and use of technology.
Survey the availability of portable water, clean air, food security, safe sanitation.
Any other relevant area.

**Group sharing:**
You are encouraged to bring your findings to the group. Have the sharing outdoors in the midst of nature where possible. Gather around a sacred space and begin with a chant. After each presentation have a time of discussion and dialogue and gather the shared wisdom.

**STEP III. REFLECTION.**

**What is God saying to us regarding this issue?**

**Church teachings:**
One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the ‘Cosmos’. -- *On Social Concern (Solicitude Rei Socialis)* 1988, No. 34

The image of the creator must shine forth ever more clearly, not only in his creature man but in all of his creation in nature.
-- *Pope Paul VI to the Council of the World Wildlife Fund, 1969*

Pope John Paul II invited some 4,000 people gathered in the rain to praise God and see the imprint of His love in the beauty of creation. He called the beauty of creation the first book that God has entrusted to the mind and heart of man. The beauty of nature impels the soul to recall God’s goodness; (the Pope) told the crowd that gathered to pray the angelus with him.
*Angelus Address given in the Italian Alps, 15 July 2001*
The ecological crisis is a moral issue... Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation... we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.

-- Pope John Paul II, 1990

‘We can no longer simply do what we like or what seems useful and promising with the earth of ours. On the contrary, we must respect the inner laws of creation, of the earth. We must listen if we want to survive and to decipher the message of the earth. Obedience to the voice of the earth is more important for our future happiness.

-Pope Benedict XVI

**Reflections of Saints, Spiritual teachers, Ecologists and others**

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers, the animals, to whom thou gave the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for thee and that they love the sweetness of life. -St. Basil the Great

The earth is at the same time mother, she is mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human.
She is mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all.
The earth of humankind contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power.
It is in so many ways fruitful.
All creation comes from it.
Yet it forms not only the basic raw material for humankind, but also the substance of the incarnation of God's son.

Prayer is nothing but the inhaling and exhaling of the one breath of the universe.  
--*Excerpts are from Hildegard's Book*, letters and songs.

Apprehend God in all things,  
for God is in all things.  
Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.  
Every creature is a word of God  
-**Meister Eckhart**

We ought to understand God equally in all things,  
for God is equally in all things. All beings love one another.  
All creatures are interdependent.  
-**Meister Eckhart**

The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw God in all things and all things in God.  
- *Blessed Julian of Norwich*

If we think of ourselves as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, we see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth.
And this is the voice of the earth. – *Joseph Campbell*

One of the most important discoveries of our time could be called the ecological conscience, which is centered in an awareness of the human's true place as a dependent member of the biotic community. *-Thomas Merton*

The human being is that one capable of hearing the thundering galaxies and supernovas, as well as picking up the song of the bird in the forest, or the soft breathing of a newborn child, and a rising up to the creator spirit who calls all to the mystery of the divine, surrendering self to all beings. Everything is and can be sacramental. *-Leonardo Boff*

Within the universe, the Planet Earth with all its wonders is the place for the meeting of the divine and the human. *–Thomas Berry*

God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but on trees, flowers, clouds and stars. *– Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Trees are poems that earth writes upon the sky,  
We feel them down and turn them into paper,  
That we may record our emptiness.  *– Kahlil Gibran*

**A Sense of Thanksgiving**

To the extent that we acquire a sense of wonder and awe at creation, we are naturally moved to give thanks to the One who created it all. An attitude of gratitude leads one to a more respectful response to creation. Each day our lives should be a thanksgiving day. If we
acquire such a viewpoint, we are much more likely to care for creation as God's gift and thus to avoid abuse of the environment.

- Fr. Lawrence E. Mick

Promote creation spirituality and simple lifestyles as a way of responding to the destructive impact of our global consumer society. (D O’Murchu)

Scriptures

The universe is the outpouring of the majesty of God, the auspicious one, radiant love. Every face you see belongs to Him. He is present in everyone without exception. - Yajur Veda.

Our Body is earth waking to consciousness. – Chandogya Upanishad

Earth, in which lie the sea, the river, and other waters,
in which food and cornfields have come to be,
in which live all that breathes and that moves, may she confer on us the finest of her yield....

Set me, O Earth, amidst what is thy center and thy navel, and vitalizing forces that emanate from thy body.
Purify us from all sides. Earth is my Mother; her son am I;
and Heaven my Father: may he fill us with plenty....

-Atharva Veda 12.1

"Let there be peace in the heavens, the Earth, the atmosphere, the water, the herbs, the vegetation, among the divine beings and in Brahman, the absolute reality. Let everything be at peace and in peace. Only then will we find peace."

The Taoist classic *The Way and Its Power (Tao te Jing)* gives this advice against the artificial exacerbation of our desires:

No lure is greater than to possess what others want,
No disaster greater than not to be content with what one has,
No presage of evil greater than that men should be wanting to get more.
Truly: He who has once known the contentment that comes simply through being content, will never again be otherwise than contented. *(Way and Its Power, p. 199)*

**PBVM Documents**

**Constitutions: C28**: We reverence the world around us, seeking as brothers and sisters to preserve and develop its natural resources. Wherever we may be, we shall try to build a more human world.

**Ch 1996**: Our vision is wholeness of creation. This demands that we reverence and nurture the earth and the cosmos.
**Ch 2001:** Conscious of the profound interaction between contemplation and action for justice and aware that where the earth is most wounded, those who are made poor suffer most:

- We reverence and care for the environment, the earth and the cosmos;
- We continue theological and scriptural reflection and education on the call to right relationships between rich and poor, women and men, humanity and cosmos.
- We commit ourselves, wherever we are, to making awareness of local and global issues of injustice an integral part of our community living and praying.

We move towards:

- radically examining our use of the earth’s resources, determining that commodities we use are not produced in violation of human rights.

**CG 2006:** Confronted with ‘our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life and to future generations’ (Earth Charter) disturbed by the divisions of our two-third/one-third world and by the destruction of the planet, we become aware of our need to develop a **spirituality of being in communion** which draws us to reverence nature and nurture the Cosmos, Earth and its peoples, particularly where these are most wounded.

**IPA Assembly 2007:** Conscious of our identity as Presentation women, we listen deeply to the cry of Earth heard most loudly in the cry of those made poor and we are moved to attend with urgency to the woundedness of our global community.

In these critical times it is imperative that we find ways to ensure that human dignity is everywhere upheld and honoured and that we name,
challenge and seek to change the systems and lifestyles in which we are complicit and which contribute to the present extremes of wealth and poverty and the degradation of Earth. Therefore we will address the root causes of poverty, especially by confronting personal and corporate greed which exploit Earth, her peoples and the whole community of life.

**In the light of the above reflections, reflect on the following:**

Recall passages from the Scriptures that shape your attitude/behavior regarding the Earth and its community of life? Are there any Biblical or Theological images that speak to you? Name the images that come to your mind.

What passages in the Scriptures speak to you about Jesus’ communion with nature?

What does the Catholic Social Teaching/Church Teachings have to say about it?

What do the Earth Charter and PBVM documents say about this issue?

**Group Sharing** Gather around a sacred space preferably outdoors to share your reflections, insights and wisdom.

**STEP IV. ACTION - PRAXIS**

What action is God calling me to?

**A. Personal Reflection**

*Read the following extracts from the Earth Charter and reflect on it using the questions given as guidelines for your reflection. Journal your reflections.*

**The Challenges Ahead**
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.* We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. *Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.*

**Universal Responsibility**

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. *The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.*

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.
THE WAY FORWARD

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter. This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.
Questions for Personal reflection
What change of mind and heart are you being called to in order to promote the values and objectives of the Earth Charter?
What fundamental changes are needed in your values, institutions and way of life
How will you move towards Being More and move away from Having More?

What difficult choices are you being called to make as a result of engaging with the Earth Charter?
How will you deal with the tensions that are the result of making such difficult choices?
What creative leadership are you called to offer as you play your vital role?

B. Personal Reflection followed by Group Sharing

Read through the Earth Charter and pick out the Principles that directly relate to your:
- Personal life
- Family/Community living
- Ministry / Work
- Spirituality / Vowed life

How would you ensure that the principle/s chosen become operative in the different aspects of your life?

e.g. 1. Personal life:
Principle I.1. a. Recognise that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
I will pay attention to the different beings that I live with, name them, see their intrinsic value and become aware of how we are interdependent.

e.g. 2. Ministry / work

Principle IV. 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

While making my lessons plans I will co-relate the curriculum I teach with sustainable living and enable the students to take concrete steps to live a sustainable way of life.

C. Group Sharing

Create a sacred space. Place the Earth Charter in it. Write the sentences that are marked in **Bold** from the extracts, on cards and place them in the Sacred space.

Begin with a chant and let each one read out the sentences from the cards.

Share your reflections and some of the actions you would like to take to make the Principles operative in your life. As you share first read the Principle and then the corresponding action.

Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving and then all stand around the sacred space and read the following:

“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.”