

The Earth Charter and Local Sustenance

By Christine Loughlin, OP

On this August day when the climatic weather patterns around the globe draw notice, members of governments and non-government organizations, United Nations and financial agencies, major groups of every kind are traveling to Johannesburg for the World Summit Meeting on Sustainable Development. A decade has passed since the famous Rio Earth Summit in 1992 when the governments worked to build a global alliance that integrates and balances development and conservation. Governments have been at work since 1972 to include ecological security as part of national and international agreements. Non-governmental organizations have also been working to circulate their own declarations and people's treaties. The Earth Charter emerges from these efforts. There was great hope that such a charter would be affirmed by the Rio Conference but that did not happen.

A new Earth Charter initiative began in 1994. That it has been formed by grassroots efforts and circulated through every imaginable means around the globe is testament to the will of the peoples of the planet that we want to influence the world's concept of sustainability. In Johannesburg the Earth Charter will seek the support of the World Summit and the endorsement of the United Nations.

What stirred the movement for such a charter? The global community realizes that international agreements have not halted ecological devastation. Nation-states, world trade organizations, military alliances, global monetary systems support multinational corporations. Through these Corporations money, consumer products, advertised wants, false notions of well-being careen around the world to fulfill the corporate dream of globalization and one basic economy. The designers themselves of this world order realize the planet must be maintained with its own renewable capacity intact to keep the flow of resources coming into the factories.

The Earth Charter is born of a different dream. It, too, uses language of "sustainable development." But the heart of its message implies "sustainable community" for it was birthed by grassroots groups who know the soils and growing seasons, the rivers and rock, the customs and cultures that have sustained the human and non-human community of a place throughout the centuries. Those who gave voice to the Charter know that economy is determined by ecology. And sustenance is the love that comes from knowing intimately the whole Earth community of a local place.

As the official members of the Summit Conference and non-government participants gather this last week in August buoyed by abundant collective efforts, they must also face and embrace the unfathomable losses that each decade brings to the living systems that sustain our planet.

I am drawn to that sense of loss. To be in this place is to have witnessed the cutting of the seven acre pine grove 1/8th mile away at the end of the road for yet another Dunkin' Donuts, this one attached to a warehouse. The road, still registered rural, is busy with traffic traveling to the outlet malls at the other end. The several acres of unprotected land between the edge of the state forest and the town conservation land are the site of ten new houses. At the clover leaf where we exit the highway to come down a mile to our street is a racetrack and soon-to-be office building.

I have not always "considered" what is gone. Perhaps it took the loss of our own CSA for me to "consider" the land. Our gardening in the future will take on a different expression. The primary site of our CSA is on land that we sold ten years ago. We now feel the deep loss of a land base we cannot secure into the future.

The more the folks gathered in Johannesburg allow themselves to comprehend the losses of the past decade, the deeper the uprising of hope that will surge from the Summit. To feel our losses here will move us to “consider the lilies of the field” as never before and to understand for the first time the true cost of the field wherein lies “the pearl of great price.”

The CSA is no longer, but the large kitchen garden is green and lush in the field by the house. There is abundance at every meal, plenty to share and give away, extra to preserve for winter eating. Our first efforts at seed saving have been imperfect but we learned how to be more attentive to this task. And we have a good supply of seeds to share at our fall equinox.

The beautiful sayings posted along our woodland trails inspire those who come for a meditative walk among the trees. We are honored to be a home site for Spirit in Nature Pathways. The celebration in song and dance of the Universe Story performed by the children in our Summer Adventures program was a special delight. Our Religious Lands Conservancy Project in partnership with the Massachusetts Coalition of Land Trusts is hard at work contemplating strategies for education and action. And the Women-Land-Spirit project begun in western Canada connects here as Crystal spring becomes the grounding site for Atlantic New England women who will enter the growing movement preparing the way for a new sisterhood with *anima mundi*.

They are arriving in Johannesburg even as I write. We feel the pulse of new day dawning—a day on which the peoples of the planet will recognize an Earth Charter that moves our moral considerations beyond human interactions and invites us to embrace an ethic that guides our relationships with the whole Earth community. To sustain this ethic we must allow ourselves to feel the loss of *what we loved but could not save*. The Earth Charter will require an openness among us...

*As we love what we alone cannot save,
As we save what we alone cannot love
As we love this world
As we so love.**

From “Between Us” As We So Love, C. McDade

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Preamble to the Earth Charter

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.

