



# EARTH CHARTER

## Study Guide

SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME • SHALOM North America  
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### CALL TO TRANSFORMATION & THE EARTH CHARTER

by S. Cathy Arata, SSND

The Call to Transformation and the Earth Charter both call us to CHANGE our way of thinking, of acting, and of being in our world.

#### MAKING CONNECTIONS

As School Sisters of Notre Dame, we dare to call one another and ourselves to radical transformation for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

“We are called and consecrated by God within the church for a radical following of Jesus Christ. As community we are sent in the power of the Spirit to continue Christ’s mission, to proclaim him, to be transformed and to transform our world, bringing all to that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent.” (*You Are Sent* 48)

[W]e call each sister of our international congregation to open her entire life to radical transformation for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ that all creation may be one in the fullness of God’s love.”

(21st General Chapter *Call to Transformation*)

Similarly, countless peoples of the world are daring to call one another to radical transformation and solidarity:

“Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living.” (Preamble to the Earth Charter)

“As never before in history,

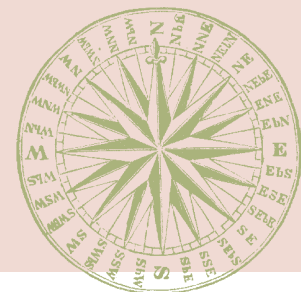
common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. . . This requires a change of mind and heart.” (Closing paragraphs of the Earth Charter)

*What words or phrases speak to you in the quotes? How would you explain or describe “oneness” or “that all may be one”? What might you consider a radical change needed in your values, institutions or way of living?*

#### ACKNOWLEDGING A CRITICAL MOMENT

The Earth Charter is known as a “people’s treaty” because it comes about after a decade-long process of input from thousands of individuals and from hundreds of groups all over the world. It comes from people of many religions, races, nationalities, and professions, as well as from people of different economic standing and social classes. The Earth Charter is a common expression of hope from diverse peoples who all dream of one harmonious world.

The Earth Charter declares that we “stand at a critical moment in earth’s history when humanity must choose its future.”



#### THE MOMENT IS CRITICAL BECAUSE:

- Only 30% of original forests in Africa remain. Nineteen of the twenty-five countries with the highest percentage of populations without access to drinking water are in Africa.

- In the Polar Regions the ozone hole over Antarctica is more than 28 million square kilometers.

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## THE MOMENT IS CRITICAL



- 52% of Europe's fish, 45% of its reptiles, and 42% of its mammals are under threat.

- Latin America faces a potential loss of at least 100,000 species from forested areas over the next 40 years.

- Virtually every country in the Middle East suffers from water scarcity and the demand for water is increasing.

- In North America, home to about 7% of the world's population, more than 25% of the world's petroleum and 30% of the world's paper products are consumed.

- 11 million children under age 5 die every year from preventable causes (equivalent to more than 30,000 a day).

- Of the 4.6 billion people in developing countries, more than 850 million are illiterate, nearly a billion lack access to improved water sources, and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation.

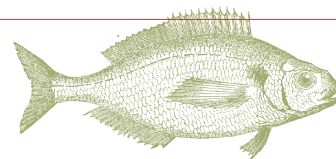
- 700,000 persons, mostly women and children, are sold each year across international borders. The average age of girls sold into prostitution has fallen from 14-16 years to 10-14 years.

- Presently there are more than 12 million refugees, 6 million internally displaced, 4 million returning refugees and asylum seekers. This is an increase of 50% since 1990.

*Which of these statistics surprised you? Which statistics most closely touch your life experience or interest? Which would you consider the most critical to address and why?*

# DREAM

## IMAGING ANOTHER WORLD



"We have heard the cry of our world. Although precious and beautiful in God's design, the earth and its peoples exist today in a fragile, divided, and fragmented condition."

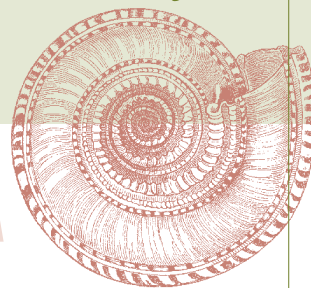
(Call to Transformation)

"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."

(Preamble, Earth Charter)

The slogan, "another world is possible" began at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, a few years ago. Pedro Casaldáliga, Bishop of São Felix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso, Brazil, says, "The first thing that has to happen in order to build this new world will be to dream it. The new will not come unless many women and men have utopian dreams of it. They then must make an effort to form it as a dream and project, as hope. For the new world to come, imagination, fantasy, hope and utopia must be put to work. To dream the other possible world is the first step towards calling it forth, giving birth to it. . . . Another way of being human is possible. That other way of being human, in the old religious language, urged us constantly towards an indeclinable conversion, the radical personal transformation, the metanoia of the evangelists. For the other possible world, the other person has to be possible."

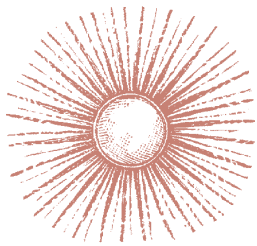
*What "cry of the world" do you hear most clearly or frequently? What would your dream of a better world include? How can we turn our "protests against" what is wrong with this world into "proposals for" another world that we want, the future about which we dream, the reign of God made manifest among us?*



# DREAM A NEW

## ACTING WITH PROPHETIC COURAGE

“At the last Earth Summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg there was a great outcry: ‘The Earth and humanity have reached a state of emergency.’ We have to save the planet and make a global turnabout. Religious life too must enter this wider movement of resistances and alternatives for defending life. Are we not an alternative society that God has proposed to our world? What good is it to go to great expense to have the founder or foundress canonized and his/her statue prominent in the garden if we do not update his/her



prophetic courage and folly? . . . We are not tired functionaries of a dying religious entity. . . . rocked in unworried comfort while we wait for eternity. We are above all else, prophets on mission to the end. Starting from the tears and joys of our time and alongside those who daily work to put a new world in place, we ought to have the courage to propose new

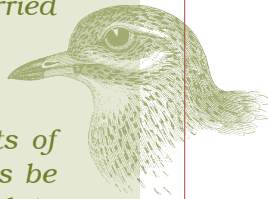
ways of living. Rooted in the prophetic movements of our day, our religious communities must situate themselves in the wider project of the God of Life and in the prophetic breeze of their charism. All searching for prophetic strategies should be marked by this creative vision of the future.”

(Benoit Fortin, O.F.M. Cap. UISG Bulletin #122, 2003)

## PROPHETIC COURAGE AND FOLLY MOTHER THERESA AND MOTHER CAROLINE

*In what ways have we updated our foundress’s “prophetic courage and folly”? In what ways are we at times “rocked in unworried comfort”?*

*In what “prophetic movements of our day” should we as SSNDs be rooted? How would you explain or define the “prophetic breeze” of SSND charism?*



## YOU ARE SENT & GENERAL CHAPTER

*You are Sent* and the Calls from the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st General Chapters have been invitations to us to update the “prophetic courage and folly” of both Mother Theresa and Mother Caroline. They have been invitations to “dream a new world” with millions of people across our planet.

Some selections from *You Are Sent* and from each of the calls are given here. To see the documents in their entirety, look back in your files or ask your province archivist for copies.

Take time to reflect once again on who we say we are by these statements and what implications they might have for us in light of our present day reality. Ponder the questions given and raise more of your own as you reread these documents which are important to our history as well as to our present and future.

YAS: Constitution 9, 16, 25, 26, 48;  
GD 2, 19, 20, 33, 37, 51

*What does it mean for you to “embrace all humanity and the whole of creation”? How can/do we witness to unity in a divided world? What “new thinking and new living” comes to mind?*

1987: 18th General Chapter of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

We contemplate Jesus Christ, who was sent to bring good news to the poor. Out of that contemplation,

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## Learn More:

<http://www.centreforearthandspirit.org>  
<http://www.columban.com>  
<http://holycrossjustice.org>  
<http://www.earthcharter.org>



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our charism, and experience, we

- Avail ourselves of opportunities to share our lives and resources with the materially poor
- Share responsibility for changing structures that create and perpetuate poverty

*What kind of “vision of the possibilities for a new world order based on Christian values” do you have? How does Pedro Casaldáliga’s “another way of being human” fit into that?*

### 1992: 19th General Chapter of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

We have heard anew the voices of the poor, the cry of creation, and the call for justice.

*What connection do you make between “the voices of the poor, the cry of creation and the call for justice” and the Call to Transformation and the Earth Charter? How would you explain or define “a right and just relationship with all of creation”?*

### 1997: 20th General Chapter of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Impelled by the spirit of Jesus Christ, we struggle in solidarity with those who are poor for justice and a global community.

*What do the Earth Charter and the Call to Transformation say about global community? Who/what is included in that global community? The “critical moments” illustrate some of the “complexity of the economic, social and political causes of poverty.” In what ways might you feel called to “confront injustice” or “work toward the elimination of unjust structures”?*

### 2002: 21st General Chapter of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

While we experience hope in the many efforts toward greater collaboration and peace-making in the human community, we see also that expanding globalization is widening the gap between rich and poor. We appreciate the giftedness of the world’s rich pluralism of cultures and religions. Yet we also see how frequently human beings respond to others out of ignorance and with hostility and violence.

In response, we call each sister of our international congregation to open her entire life to radical transformation for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ that all creation may be one in the fullness of God’s love.

*In your opinion, what are some of the “communal conversions necessary to embrace our Gospel responsibility to live simply, making the concerns of the poor our own, and reverencing all creation”?*

*What practical steps/decisions can we SSNDs ask each other to make in order to effect a “global turn-about” and help bring about another world?*

*As you read through the information on these pages, what thoughts and feelings did you have regarding the Call to Transformation and the Earth Charter?*

Sources for the material quoted:

1. The Moment is Critical continental statistics came from: [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)
2. Other statistics came from the UN Human Development Report, 2001
3. Casaldaliga, Pedro, “2004 Global Latin America Agenda,” Social Justice Committee, 1857 de Maisonneuve W., Montreal, Quebec Canada H3H 1J9