

30 Days to Communion with Creation



A Work of the Community of Saint Joseph,
Carondelet

A Guide from the Wisdom Circle of 2009

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On Communion with Earth

The sacredness of all of life and creation motivates our urgent concern for Earth and the survival of its life systems. Destructive aspects of globalization, the unequal distribution and use of resources and other human behaviors affect those who are economically poor and marginalized most immediately and intensely.

We acknowledge our own complicity and call ourselves to radical choices in order to be just with, not abusive of, Earth's resources. Recognizing the urgency of working to protect and restore Earth's healthy living systems in these next years, we are challenged to express unifying love by becoming stronger leaders and joining with others in working for systemic change that will enable all to live in right relationship with Earth.

ACT OF CHAPTER

Thirty members of the Albany, Los Angeles, St. Louis, St. Paul Provinces and the Congregational Leadership Team met at White Violet Center for Eco-Justice, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, from June 19-21, 2009. Our intent was to renew old friendships, form new ones, and see what might emerge around deepening the Congregational embodiment of our Act of Chapter on Communion with Earth.

Our gathering, hosted by Matrix sectional from the St.Louis province and facilitated by Liz Kerwin CSJ and Susan Oeffling CSJ from the St. Paul Province, used ritual, group process, and formal and informal interactions as we moved through our few days together. The recorder for the weekend was Patrick Jendraszak from the St. Louis Province. We began on Friday evening by posting newspaper headlines about Province happenings as a way to acquaint each other with what was happening in each of the provinces, Vice-Provinces, and congregational Missions -- a wonderful way to gather together our efforts.

Small group sharing on Saturday morning raised many common issues and, in the afternoon, we moved to an Open Space process and generated three groups which developed action steps. One of those steps was to develop and promulgate a reflection booklet, "Communion with Creation...in 30 Days or Less."

This booklet is a result of that commitment. As a group, we reflected that systemic change occurs one person at a time, and that the spiritual shift called for involves systemic change for our Congregation, our communities, and ourselves. We offer these reflections as a "stepping off point" as we move forward into a new way of being with creation.

Trees: Earth's Lungs

Elizabeth Kerwin, CSJ

KNOW

Trees are the earth's lungs. They take in carbon dioxide which we put into the air and use it in the process of photosynthesis, making their own food as well as providing nourishment for animals and for us. The trees give off oxygen which is essential for all animal life including our own. As forests are clear cut for farming or construction or when they are burned in massive fires, earth's lungs become diseased and our lungs suffer as well.

EXPERIENCE

Befriend a tree. Sit under it or near it and reflect on its gift of breath for you. How do you feel about the devastation of millions of acres of trees around the world? Let yourself experience your gratitude for the gift of trees and other vegetation as well.

REFLECTION

What has moved you or invited you to some action, or deeper awareness or connectedness with your plant sisters and brothers?



Environmental Economics

Donna Gibbs, CSJ

KNOW

The GDP does not assess what is growing—well-being or discontent, social coherency or social breakdown, ecological health or environmental degradation. In each area we have to spend money, so the GDP grows whether the economy reflects genuine well-being or not. The Genuine Progress Indicator, developed in 1994 by Redefining Progress, considers more than twenty elements of our economic lives ignored by the GDP. The loss of biodiversity, the squandering of forest land, strip mining, oil extraction and water waste count as liquidation of assets. Polluting activities and clean-up expenses like superfund toxic sites, nuclear waste storage, landfills and the Exxon Valdez oil spill are counted as costs. Natural disasters like Hurricane Andrew and the treatment of environmental sicknesses are also counted as costs. The GDP counts all these expenditures and benefits.

EXPERIENCE

Redefining Progress (www.rprogress.org) offers an ecological footprint calculator. Find out how many Earth's would be consumed if everyone lived your lifestyle. Consider the true cost of the next ten purchases you make. Include the cost to soil, air, water and biodiversity. Write down as many true costs you can think of that are not included in the price of the item.



REFLECTION

How can you begin to shift your economic impact so that the well being of all Earth life and Earth systems factor into the bottom line? Identify the first step you want to take.



Into the Night Sky

Linda Maser, CSJ

KNOW

13.7 billion years ago, our universe began to form. According to current scientific explorations, it has continued to expand at a very precise rate – not 1 trillionth of a second too fast or too slow – in a way that allows the process to continue – In fact, Brian Swimme estimates that there are currently 16 galaxies for each person currently living on Earth.

Not only is the universe expanding, but it is also increasing in both complexity and diversity as the galaxies take on new shapes and forms – spiral, elliptical, and irregulars.

EXPERIENCE

Look up into the night skies preferably at a place away from city lights. Or find pictures of the universe as revealed by the Hubble telescope. Consider the magnificence of a universe as we are coming to know it. Just be present with what you see (and don't see beyond your range of vision.)

REFLECTION

Can I begin to understand the implications of a universe that is not dead but instead is a living and growing organism?

What does this reveal to me about the divine? About my faith?

What else will we learn about the universe as we continue to explore?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Brian Swimme from a lecture given at Seattle University, Seattle University in the summer of 2009

Source: Coelho, Mary Conrow. *Awakening Universe, Emerging Personhood: The Power of Contemplation in an Evolving Universe*. Lima, Ohio: Wyndam Hall Press, 2002.

Glass of Water

Toni Nash, CSJ

KNOW

From science we learn that before the Universe was three minutes old, the nuclei of hydrogen were created, and that hydrogen nuclei were never again created! Hydrogen was the first element, and makes up 90 percent of all the atoms in the Universe. The water in your glass has two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen.

EXPERIENCE

Look at the water you have poured into a glass. Note its transparency, smell, color and weight. Take a sip of your water and reflect.

REFLECTION

The water I just sipped contains hydrogen nuclei that were created 13.7 billion years ago! Through them I am connected to the sacred moment of Original Creation. I imagine hydrogen nuclei in the water throughout my body, in water everywhere, in the air and throughout the Universe. I am in communion with all the waters, in the people, the rivers, seas and lakes, and with those who thirst for water.



Take a Deep Breath

Marion Honors, CSJ

KNOW

Most of the air we breathe is nitrogen (78%) and oxygen (21%) but 1% is argon, an inert gas. Because it is inert, when it is breathed in and out, it does not become part of our bodies. Each breath we take contains 30,000,000,000,000,000 atoms of argon. When we exhale, the argon atoms quickly travel through the neighborhood, into the atmosphere and around the planet. A year later each breath we take includes at least 15 argon atoms from the very breath we exhaled a year earlier! The air we breathe today has been used for millions of years by all of Earth's creatures. It is a sacred cycle of life.



EXPERIENCE

Take a deep breath and slowly exhale.

REFLECTION

I realize that it is likely that in this one breath there are some atoms from the snorts and howls of grazing dinosaurs; some from the prayers of our cave-dwelling ancestors; some from Jesus, St. Teresa, Mother St. John Fontbonne, my grandparents and parents; some from animals, birds, insects, and plants in danger of extinction; some from the young of all species everywhere celebrating life. Through one breath I am in deep communion with all others, past and present and even the future as I imagine those who one day will be breathing some of the same air I have breathed.

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Suzuki, David. *The Sacred Balance*. Vancouver/Toronto: Greystone Books, 1997.

Traveling the Galaxies

Marion Honors, CSJ

KNOW

Earth spins a thousand miles an hour as she rotates on her axis giving us night and day. In an orbital path around the sun, Earth moves at an additional 68,000 miles an hour. The sun, with Earth and the other planets, travels among the stars of the galaxy at 34,000 miles an hour and the entire Milky Way Galaxy turns at 80,000 miles an hour!

EXPERIENCE

Sit quietly in my home place, unmoving, with a stone to hang onto, grounding me.

REFLECTION

I try to realize that I really am whirling among the stars at astounding speeds. Can I feel within me a sense of inner space opening up to make room for wonderful immensities, for which I have no frame of reference at all? I try to rest in “the numinous presence whence all things come into being.” (Thomas Berry)

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: Chet Raymo. *Honey from Stone: A Naturalist's Search for God*. Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2005.



Radiant Rocks

Donna Gibbs, CSJ

KNOW

Quantum physics helps us deepen our relationship with Earth. In Newtonian physics the basic understanding is that light bounces off a rock into our eyes. This is not what is taking place. The photon of light interacts with the electrons of the rock and an entirely new photon of light is released. The rock absorbs the sun's light into itself and then expresses itself, giving off its own rock-light. It radiates self-disclosure. Earth discloses itself and we are there to respond. We enter into relationship. We emerge anew.

EXPERIENCE

We deepen our relationships through what we disclose. Usually this is human to human. Spend this day attentive to what other-than-human members of our Earth community may disclose to you. Pay particular attention to your responses, feelings, imaginings, sensations, awakenings.

REFLECTION

What allured you? What challenged you? What is emerging through the relationships you formed?



Hands

Pat Bergen, CSJ

KNOW

My hand...it is almost 14 billion years old! It has taken this long for such a magnificent part of creation to develop. Everything since the beginning has shaped it. All protons in my hand were formed in the intense heat of the primal fireball. The atoms of my hand once were part of the smooth vast clouds that filled expanding space. These burst into stars. In the explosion of one star, Earth was formed. Every atom of my hand was there! All that has happened in the story of Earth is contained in my hand. The emergence of simple bacteria from Earth's seas, the formation of rocks and forests, the developments in worms and mammals have all affected the development of my hand. Millions of years of trial and error have contributed to the formation of my hand. To tell the story of my hand is to tell the story of the Universe. (By Pat Bergen CSJ)



EXPERIENCE

There is almost 14 billion years of wisdom stored in your hands. Honor your hands in all you engage them in today.

REFLECTION

What is the advantage of Earth having hands? What in particular do your hands offer the larger Earth community?

Bonding with the Universe

Jeanne Cools, CSJ

KNOW

As author Michael Morwood states, “Everything and everyone we see in this universe participates in God and gives God a way of coming to expression....We are all connected in God and we give God wonderfully diverse ways of coming to visibility.”



EXPERIENCE

I've decided to change the world today;
not just my own little world, but the whole big one!
If what I do today has a ripple effect,
then my doing, with awareness and intention,
can and will change this world, if only microscopically.
What an awesome idea – so I'm saying,
“I love you” over and over again.

REFLECTION

What will you say today to change the world? Try saying, “I love you.” to some thing as well as someone today and don't forget to say it to the Creator! Try different sayings and see what changes happen in your attitude, behavior, and care of persons or things of which you are connected!

Piece of Fruit

Marion Honors, CSJ

KNOW

Each piece of fruit that we eat connects us to a different web of reality. If it has been commercially produced, the over-stressed soil it came from has been artificially pumped up on fertilizers, the atmosphere between its growing site and my hand has received exhaust fumes and those who grew, picked and transported it sometimes underpaid and damaged by the chemicals. If it was bought locally and organic, the soil it came from is being maintained in a healthy state, the atmosphere has received a lot less fumes, and the price we paid helps the producers to earn a decent living wage and work in a healthy environment.

EXPERIENCE

Take a bite of your fruit, and while you are chewing, reflect.

REFLECTION

What web of life am I connecting with as I eat this fruit? Do I know if I am contributing to the health of the soil, atmosphere and people who worked to bring it to me?



Evolution, Just a Theory?

Marion Honors, CSJ



KNOW

Clarification about the meaning of the word “theory” as it is used by scientists is especially helpful in reference to the Theory of Evolution. When the Theory of Evolution is said to be “just a theory,” it is being dismissed as unproved or only a guess or lacking credibility. In scientific terms, when something reaches the status of being called a theory, its existence is no longer open to conjecture, its existence has been proven through the rigorous processes of the scientific method and is generally accepted as true. Further, a scientific theory must be open to modification based on new evidence. We are integral to an evolutionary universe continuing to unfold.

EXPERIENCE

On a clear night, stand wordlessly beneath the stars.

REFLECTION

I am filled with awe that I exist. Gratitude for such a gift surrounds me and I feel called to respond to the stars. Perhaps a dance....

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: www.wilstar.com/theories.html or science dictionaries.

Water

Linda Crosby, CSJA

KNOW

Water scarcity affects one in three people on every continent of the globe. The situation is getting worse as needs for water rise along with population growth,



urbanization and increases in household and industrial uses. Water scarcity occurs even in areas where there is plenty of rainfall or freshwater. How water is conserved, used and distributed can determine if there is enough to meet the demands of households, farms, industry and the environment. Water scarcity forces people to rely on unsafe sources of drinking water. It also means they cannot bathe or clean their clothes or homes properly.

EXPERIENCE

Think about your use of water each day. Try limiting that use for a day, or two, or a week. Turn off the tap as you brush your teeth, as you suds up for hand washing and for your shower. Set a timer to see how long you spend in the shower, then cut that by one-third.

REFLECTION

After my initial discomfort, am I really okay? Am I as clean as I was last week? Can I agree to continue to limit my use of water by conserving in these small ways? Can I encourage others in this effort? Is this one way I am more in communion with those who struggle for water?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: World Health Organization <http://who.int/features/factfiles/water/>

A Quiet Place in Nature

Angela Schreiber, CSJ

KNOW

100,000 years ago, human language began to emerge; 30,000 years ago, humans began to create and use musical instruments; 200 years ago the Industrial Revolution took place. Today all these evolutions have coalesced into humans who are plugged in (iPods, cell phones), and into machines (refrigerators, lawn mowers) that emit unending sound, blocking or covering voices from nature..

EXPERIENCE

Find a quiet place in a park, a field or by water. Identify any sounds created by humans; let them drift away as you identify non-human voices (bird songs, lapping water, rustling leaves).

REFLECTION

How can I let the non-human voices be heard in my everyday world? What meaning do these voices carry for me?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: Global Education Associates Upper Midwest, editors. (2004). An Amazing Journey. The Universe and Me. St.Paul, MN: St. Paul Printing Company.



Death ... and Life

Karen Monroe, CSJA

KNOW

“Unequal aspects of globalization, the unequal distribution and use of resources and other human behaviors affect those who are economically poor and marginalized immediately and intensely” (CSJ 2007 Chapter). Judy Cannato tells us , “Death is woven into the fabric of the universe an integral part of the Mystery of life itself. Both {death and life} are linked to the creativity and release of Spirit that moves life along.”



EXPERIENCE

As you move through the day, notice the little deaths of letting go or putting another person first, listening rather than speaking, waiting to hear the movements of the Spirit, deciding NOT to buy an unnecessary object.

REFLECTION

Consider your own transformation as you participate in the chaos, death, and birth of Life. Consider how your Communion with the whole allows healing of your inner self, contributes to the healing of Earth's pain, and links you to the creative release of Spirit that moves life along. Consider how you interrupt the cycle of poverty-violence when you refuse to participate in consumerism.

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: Radical Amazement, Judy Cannato.

Our Fire Within

Carol Patron, CSJ

KNOW

Since the explosion of the fireball over twenty billion years ago, the universe has bestowed on us the gift of fire and taught us its use. From the massive heat and light of the sun to the fiery and molten center of Earth, the power of fire is needed for and gives life to all that is. This basic element of creation stirs our passion for life, for justice, for creativity. We are fueled by the energy of fire from within and without, from the energy infused into us daily by the energy of all beings.

EXPERIENCE

Sit before a fire or in the sun or light a circle of candles.

Place a red gold or orange cloth in front of you or hold it in your lap. Let the warmth of the fire, the sun or the movement of the flames of your candles move you to a quiet stillness. Imagine yourself growing roots and sinking them down into the molten core of earth. Anchor yourself here and draw Earth's fiery energy into yourself.

REFLECTION

How is fire manifested within me? Is it a volcano waiting to erupt or a force for power that releases creativity and connection? How do I shape this fire into a vision that lets all of creation fuel my spirit? How do I fuel my own fire?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: The Universe Is A Green Dragon, Brian Swimme. The Wisdom of the Elements, The Sacred Wheel of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, Margie McArthur



Powerful Creatures, Great and Small

PB Bounk, CSJ

KNOW

Squish, stomp, slap, swish, swat, scream! Is that what you do with insects? Bees, ants, beetles, flies, spiders, butterflies, and many others can speak to you. Ancient peoples honored insects as messengers. These people were very attentive to flying and crawling beings that crossed their paths, and they sought to discover the truths these messengers taught. It should never be easy to take any kind of life, even the smallest.



EXPERIENCE

Sit quietly and watch and listen to an insect that seems to irritate you.

REFLECTION

How do the activities of this insect support a community? What characteristics do this insect display that are similar to humans?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: Animal-Speak. Ted Andrews

An Oak Tree Moment

Donna Gibbs, CSJ



KNOW

Carbon, assembled in the stars, and widely distributed in nature manifests as oak tree. Oak tree, one potentiality of carbon links the bird in its branches, the air surrounding its leaves, the soil beneath its roots, the water within its limbs and me leaning against its trunk. We form a carbon community. Are carbon atoms contemplating through me? I understand myself by understanding all that makes up this tree leaning moment from its very beginning

billions of years ago. The moment unfolds another moment and another never again moment. This is the wonder and horror of the Universe—each moment unfolding in profound connection with the next. Through such successive moments the Universe invites human choice—my choice with all the wisdom and ignorance it carries. Tomorrow, next week, or perhaps next year, when the choice to cut down the oak tree, or let it stand enters the moment, what will I do? The tree and I are very real parts of each other.

EXPERIENCE

Calculate your carbon footprint for at least one week. There are many calculators available on the internet. (Carbonfund.org is one example) Choose at least one way to offset some, if not all of your carbon emissions for the week. This can, but does not necessarily need to involve a monetary payment.

REFLECTION

Which Earth flora or fauna would you miss the most should human created climate change bring it to extinction? Write to the future generation about your intimate connection with your chosen species. Be sure to include steps you have or are taking in order to preserve its future. Share your letter with others.

Lost Ocean Treasures

Jeanne Cools, CSJ

KNOW

Researchers warned Sunday that miles-long underwater plumes of oil from the spill could poison and suffocate sea life across the food chain, with damage that could endure for a decade or more. "Researchers have found more underwater plumes of oil than they can count from the blown-out well." said Samantha Joye, a professor of marine sciences at the University of Georgia. She also said, "...careful measurements taken of one plume showed it stretching for 10 miles, with a 3-mile width....This can interrupt the food chain at the lowest level, and will trickle up and certainly impact organisms higher... Whales, dolphins and tuna all depend on lower depths to survive."

EXPERIENCE

I visited the aquarium yesterday
where beauty, and God's imagination,
is beyond belief in its revelation!
Seals and sea lions, otters and octopus,
sting rays and sharks, turtles and toads –
each as unique as you and me!
Green anemones, blue sea urchins, and huge jelly fish –
some floating, some clinging, some changing colors –
so many my skilled eyes were want to count!
The corals did fascinate me the most –
looking like delicately designed lace
in colors only angels could create!
Our world's treasures lie in the depths of the sea –
not in chests of jewels and minted coins,
but in our shared oneness of life and being!



REFLECTION

You needn't live near the ocean to influence it or be influence by it. Track for one full day your connection to Earth's oceans. How can you promote healthy ocean life?



Gratitude and Grief

Joanna Bramble, CSJ

KNOW

Both gratitude for the beauty of our planet and grief for its destruction often lead to experiencing our oneness with all beings. Immense joy and unspeakable sorrow, radical contemplation and contemplative action are all closely related. Our apparent public apathy is often a fear of experiencing and expressing our pain, and even our joy. Acknowledging both impels us to act on behalf of our world.

EXPERIENCE

Close your eyes. Bring to your awareness the beauty of a place in nature that you love. Let your body express as a prayer your gratitude for this beauty.

Slowly open your eyes. Walk a few feet and stand in a different space. Close your eyes.

Imagine yourself in a war zone. Ten suicide bombers have struck at the same time, killing or wounding many people, animals, trees, and plants. You are an observer; you are not physically being hurt. Allow images of what that might be like to come into your awareness. Your prayer is simply **BEING WITH** your feelings in the presence of God.

Still standing where you are with your eyes closed, let yourself **HOLD BOTH** before God **AT THE SAME TIME**: the beauty of a place you love **AND** your pain about war. Offer yourself together with both your gratitude and your grief.

REFLECTION

What do you know in your own life about holding apparent opposites: joy and pain, beauty and terror, gratitude and grief?

Wildflowers

Louise McDonald, CSJ



KNOW

It is not easy to define a wildflower. What one person may call a wildflower another person may consider a weed. But it is agreed that they are wild plants with

flowers and may be found anywhere from cracks in city sidewalks to beaches or deserts, pristine forests or mountain meadows. A flower can grow from a seed to a mature plant releasing its own seeds in a few weeks. It also has a symbiotic relationship with the insect world. Wildflowers are particular to geography, soil, climate and other vegetation. They grow almost anywhere that the land is untilled and undeveloped and even in crevices of rocks. In the Northern Rocky Mountain Region of North America alone, for example, there are an estimated 2,000 species.

EXPERIENCE

Take a drive outside of the city and stop where you see wildflowers. Admire and photograph them but don't pick them. To learn more buy or borrow a book or DVD of wildflowers commonly found in your bioregion and learn to identify them. A good resource is the gift shops in National Parks, National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, National Monuments or State Parks, and the Internet.

REFLECTION

How can I offer the wildflowers my appreciation and blessing? How can I become knowledgeable about and take action on local loss of habitat through global warming/climate change, land development, crops, logging, insecticides, herbicides and pollution of air, soil and water?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Lewiston Tribune article by Eric Barker, June 6, 2006.

National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers, Western Region by Richard Spellenberg, 1979.

Northern Rocky Mountain Wildflowers by H. Wayne Phillips, the Globe Pequot Press, 2001



Living in Two Worlds

Donna Gibbs, CSJ

KNOW

We live in the time of two worlds. One is divided by lines. These lines separate us: into time zones; along latitudinal and longitudinal degrees; into countries run by governmental structures; according to resources; economically; into language groupings; according to weapon technologies. A world divided by human constructed boundaries sends us spinning into a reality that cuts us off from our true nature. We live in the time of two worlds. We did not appear onto this world.

We grew from this world. As the human expression of a Sacred Universe, we embrace a world that is: cyclical and emergent; powered by Sun, interdependent, self-sustaining; self-organizing; diverse and unified; intimate. We live in the time of two worlds. We are the living, breathing transition. Sacred, Source of Being, help us understand that we are not earthlings. We are Earth.

EXPERIENCE

Place a map or globe of the world next to a picture of Earth from space. (You can easily get one from the internet). Spend some minutes with the map. Then spend some minutes with the space shot of Earth.

REFLECTION

Who are you within the context of the world map? Who are you within the context of Earth as seen from outer space?



Spider on the Wall

Celia DuRea, CSJ

KNOW

Somewhere I read that the body of a spider has over 300 articulations, that is, moving parts. Isn't that amazing for such a small creature. Their intricate webs are used to catch insects, those "pesty" creatures that we so often complain about, that "bug" us. Did you know that the humming bird uses the webs of spiders to make their tiny nests? The stickiness serves as a glue to hold the nest together. We admire the spider's web, especially when it is covered with the drops of morning dew, or the moisture after a rain. It has been found, in the scientific world that the web reflects the effects of weather and diet on the spider, and that caustic ingredients in the diet influence the shape of the web, leaving unfinished spokes, or a crooked, ragged array. For this reason, laboratories have started to domesticate spiders for the purpose of using their webs to test drugs.

EXPERIENCE

The next time you see a spider on the wall or outside in your garden, take a moment to reflect on how it is wonderfully made. Consider how important and valuable the spider is in the "web" of life and in its interrelatedness to other creatures, including ourselves.

REFLECTION

Did you ever stop to honor the life of the spider? Spider, spider on the wall, I give thanks for your presence in the "WEB OF LIFE" of which we are all a part.

Earth's Name

Marion Honors, CSJ

KNOW

Earth is the only planet in our solar system not named for a god or goddess! Unlike Mars or Venus, the name of our home planet Earth is often left without the gentle honor that comes from one's name being capitalized. The origin of the name "Earth" probably goes back to the Old High German, *erda*, meaning "ground," or "the (material) world" as opposed to the heavens. It was around 1400 as the main waves of the Black Death were winding down in Europe that "Earth" gradually began to be used as the name of our planet. Today, many people, instead of calling our home planet "Earth," use the name of the ancient Greek goddess of Earth, Gaia.

EXPERIENCE

Simply write her name on a piece of paper folded like a card as I resolve henceforth to capitalize the name Earth whenever it refers to the name of our home planet.

REFLECTION

Are there some other names for Earth that arise in me? Do any of them surprise me?



Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: Online Etymology
Dictionaries

O Rock of My Soul

Diane Smith, CSJ

KNOW

Rocks are living things. When Earth came into being rocks were formed with a unique atomic structure. The makeup of a rock is specific to its geological location. As Earth's plates continue to slide underneath each other rocks are melted into magma. They then take on a new life as they resurface in volcanic action. Due to human action many rocks have been moved to places other than their natural setting.

EXPERIENCE

Find out what you can about the unique rock formations in your area. What forces of nature created them or moved them?

REFLECTION

Find a rock or better yet let one find you. Hold it in your hand and caress it. How does it feel? What is its shape? Rub it against your cheek. Is it smooth or rough? As you hold the rock listen to what it wants to say to you. Feel your oneness with this rock and all creation.



Experience the Weather

Toni Nash, CSJ

KNOW

"The impact of climate change falls heaviest on the world's poor. As Catholics, our faith demands prudent action." Because of our cars and power plants, more energy consumption and waste—we're leaving a bigger carbon footprint. Scientists tell us that means more climate change. Here and around the world, it is the poor who will be hit hardest with more droughts, floods, hunger and joblessness. As faithful



Catholics, we have a moral obligation to care for both Creation and the poor. Pope Benedict XVI insists, "Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions to curb climate change."

EXPERIENCE

Today you will have to go somewhere by walking or riding in a car, bus, train or plane. Experience the air you are moving through, its temperature and movement. Is it foggy or cloudy or clear or rainy or smoggy or sleeting? Lately have you found yourself saying, "It isn't normally like this?"

REFLECTION

Think about the thin layer of atmosphere which surrounds our planet in all its swirling movement. Then think about those who are being affected by changes in their weather patterns. Unusual droughts and flooding are already causing a new wave of refugees, "climate refugees." Can reducing my carbon footprint really make a difference for them? How can I be in communion with the air I breathe and the others who also breathe it?

Source, Inspiration, Further Reading

Source: United States Catholic Conference website



Desert

Abundance

Diane Smith, CSJ

KNOW

Deserts have a reputation for supporting very little life, but in reality deserts often have high biodiversity, including animals that remain

hidden during daylight hours to control body temperature or to limit moisture needs. Some fauna includes the kangaroo rat, coyote, jack rabbit, and many lizards. Desert animals (and plants) show especially clear evolutionary adaptations for water conservation or heat tolerance. Deserts typically have a plant cover that is sparse but enormously diverse. The giant saguaro cacti of the Sonoran Desert provide nests for desert birds and serve as "trees" of the desert. The saguaro grow slowly but may live up to 200 years. At 9 years old, they are about 15 centimeters (6 in) high. After about 75 years, they develop their first branches. When fully grown, saguaro cacti are 15 meters (50 ft) tall and weigh as much as 10 tons. Now that's abundance!

EXPERIENCE

If you have the opportunity to visit a desert do so in a cooler month. Take time to walk out into the desert and observe the many variety of plants. You may be lucky enough to see some animal life. If the opportunity to visit a desert is not practical go onto the internet and take a virtual tour of the many deserts in the United States or throughout the world.

REFLECTION

The desert may give the impression that it is lifeless but in reality it is teeming with life that has adapted and adjusted to its environment. Since we are one with all creation what is the desert teaching me about scarcity and abundance in my life?

The Largest Animal

Bob Carney, CSJA

KNOW

The blue whale is the largest animal that ever lived on Earth. Whales have lived on Earth 54 million years. The female can live 110 years. They are known for their intelligence and sensitivity. Their mournful lament tells the story of their history. By the 1950s, 99% of the blue whales on Earth had been annihilated. One half of a million had been killed in the California/Alaska pacific, leaving only 200 whales. In 1966, the International Whale Commission was able to stop the whaling before they had become extinct. The middle aged and older whales who survived the mass annihilation remember the human threat in their waters and the death of their mothers. Their calves are carefully taught. Today there are about 1700 blue whales in the California/Alaska pacific.

EXPERIENCE

The heart of the blue whale is the size of a Volkswagen. The arteries to their heart are large enough for a human to crawl through. Their tongue can support the weight of 50 people. Their communication sounds, often described as a mournful lament, can be heard for 1000 miles, the length of California.

REFLECTION

Are the whales worthy of our prayers? Is the International Whale Commission worthy of our time and support?



Do Animals Pray?

Jeanne Cools, CSJ



KNOW

Google the Question: “Do animals pray?” and you will find wonderful answers like the following: “If GOD created all beings do animals pray? Sometimes I see a dog with eyes closed with nose pointing to sky and weeping. Are they praying? I saw a cat suddenly drop to the floor, put its front paws over its ears and go in a trance. What is happening? Even the fish swim backstroke in the aquarium when one fish dies.” (from Kaliyug Ka Plato)

EXPERIENCE

Be still as the sun rises and take notice
of how each creature faithfully pauses
to say its morning prayer!

Birds pause before they rustle sleep out of their feathers.

Cats pause before they stretch their spines out of curled relaxation.

Dogs pause before they shake themselves into new hair arrangements.

Bugs pause before they scurry beyond their hidden night dwellings.

If only I would remember to consciously pause,
my morning prayer might make a busy day
go a lot better!

REFLECTION

If you have a dog, cat, fish, or other non-human pet, take some time to pause in its presence and either ask it to pray with you and/or simply pray in its presence.

Surrounded by Beauty

Diane Smith, CSJ

KNOW

Recently I received a ticket for parking next to the house we were renting. I was shocked and after many phone calls I was told that our street had a four hour parking limit and that there were posted signs. I went outside and was startled to discover that I had lived in this neighborhood for seven months and never saw the signs. So I had to ask myself, "What else am I not seeing?" It occurred to me that I was surrounded by trees and other plant life which housed squirrels and was visited by a variety of birds. I opened my eyes and began to relish the life that had gone unseen and unheard.



EXPERIENCE

When I taught in the inner city, which exteriorly was not a place of beauty, I took my class for a walk around the block to find a tree, plant or something in nature to touch and take time to stop and appreciate. The children began to bring to class some things of nature that they had found on their way to school. Take a walk around your neighborhood. What animal or plant life is there that you have not seen before? Take time to see its beauty and listen to the sounds of nature.

REFLECTION

Quiet your mind and open your eyes and ears to the beauty that surrounds you. What does it tell you about yourself? Cherish the fact that you are one with what you are seeing and that is simply manifesting itself in another form.

Transformation

Karen Monroe, CSJA

KNOW

“The Sacredness of all of life and creation motivates our urgent concern for Earth and the survival of all life systems.” Chapter '07 Judy Cannato tells us that all of Earth systems received energy from the sun, but when the chlorophyll cell developed the ability through photosynthesis to eat the photons of the sun and transform them into sugar and oxygen, the whole Earth system changed. Jesus was the first human to be able to receive fully the energy of God’s love and transform it into Bread and Spirit. We also receive the gift of God’s Love and Life and are transformers of life into Spirit and Bread.

EXPERIENCE

As you sit or drive watch the many forms of sunlight change forms; notice how the trees absorb the carbon dioxide of humans and transform them into oxygen. When you are with another person, be aware of the miracle of energy being absorbed in that person through sunlight and food; direct your energy of loving thought toward that person praying that it will be transformed into Spirit and Food for the journey.



REFLECTION

Consider how you receive God’s Light and Food and are transformed. Consider how you are part of the photosynthetic cycle and pass on Spirit and Food. Imagine yourself receiving and sending out God’s Light and sweetness.