



THE ECOLOGY FRONTIER

CLC members from around the world were invited, at the 2013 World Assembly in Lebanon, to join together to “go to the frontiers of our social realities, to discern and develop a plan to raise awareness of the four frontiers: poverty, ecology, family and youth. Ixthus CLC was asked to form a working group to address the ecology frontier. This article presented by Beulah Costain on behalf of Ixthus CLC (Canada), is one response to that request.

Soil Sustainability

Growing up on a mixed farm on PEI made me aware that good soil was the source of our physical and economical well-being. My father carefully tilled the soil each spring, planted and maintained crops until harvest and our family enjoyed the results of his work all winter. We, as children, learned the importance of respect for the land and all creatures living on our land, providing necessary organic nutrients to the soil. My years living on a farm taught me the importance of caring for the soil.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) states. “Healthy soil is the foundation for food security and is the key to sustaining life on earth”.

There are more than 805 million people in the world facing hunger and malnutrition today and unfortunately *33% of our world soil resources are reaching critical limits of degradation*. Poor land management, exploitation of natural resources, over cultivation, overuse of chemical fertilizers, urbanization, and industrial encroachment, deforestation, and mining are some of the causes of soil deterioration. Soil is almost a non-renewable resource in that *it takes more than 300 years to form 1” of topsoil* and soils have been neglected for too long. We must work to turn this tendency around and become more aware that soil is of critical importance to our lives. 95% of the world’s supply of food depends on soil. Soil is where food begins, and healthy food depends on healthy soil.

Soil is one of nature’s most complex ecosystems and diverse habitats on earth. Only 9 sq. ft. of soil can contain over 1000 species of invertebrates in forest lands. These organisms perform

numerous functions which impact the earth's biological, atmospheric, and hydrological systems and thus add to the sustainability of healthy agricultural land.

In countries where crop rotation is not practiced, the same crops are planted year after year. This can result in soil nutrients being depleted to the point where plants are no longer healthy and strong. These plants often become prey to predators and in most cases results in more chemicals being sprayed to control pests. These chemicals along with fertilizers used on the land are eventually washed into waterways; this promotes the growth of algae which in turn depletes oxygen resulting in anoxic waters which cannot support plant or animal life.

Our Federal and Provincial governments need to put teeth into legislation to ensure farmers and industries abide by the rules set for preventing environmental damage to soil. At present, soil regulations are primarily a provincial responsibility. However, cases where provincial law is questioned the matter can become subject to decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada. Some protective legislation includes: liability for clean-up after a land/water contamination incident, certain changes in land use eg. park/farm land becoming industrial/residential land, approval and operation of waste sites, proper disposal of hazardous materials, spreading of waste materials on farmland, etc. We, as individuals, need as well, to respect legislation. Use of cosmetic pesticides and herbicides on lawns, roadside litter, waste management, fuel consumption, recycling, etc., are primarily a personal responsibility. Each time we do something to protect our environment is important. As Pope Francis said in **Laudato Si**, "Nothing in this world is indifferent to us".

Sometimes we do see actions which we know are abusive to our environment and keep quiet. Perhaps now is the time to see ourselves as stewards of the earth, we must speak up. Pope Francis reminds us in **Laudato Si** "We are an image of God, but that should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose". Never has the human race had such power over creation, but we need to consider how it is being used at the present time and protect it for future generations. Each small action we take to promote good stewardship of the land is a response to the call to cooperate in caring for creation. I will share a recent incident in which I was able to take action. We live next to a parish owned field which is cultivated by a farmer who mostly uses responsible land practices. We were informed by our pastor that the farmer was going to cut down a beautiful spruce tree because it was in the way of his making straight rows on the land. I became very disturbed by this and met with our pastor who said he had already given permission to the farmer and the matter was closed. I approached the farmer and explained to him why I was so upset. I said, "It takes only a few minutes of your time to drive your tractor around the tree which took fifty or more years to grow. It provides nutrients to the soil and habitat for birds and animals." He was not happy with my request to leave the tree standing, but after a longer conversation he did make the decision to leave the tree. Each time I go out and see the tree I am affirmed that I made the right decision(though small) to act on my call to be a steward of the land.

In closing I will use a quote from a 2010 Toronto Star interview with the late James Profit S.J. who was the founder of the Jesuit Ecology Project in Guelph Ont. "Spiritual connection (with the land) does not just happen *down on the farm*, but can be nourished even on concrete sidewalks. We can prayerfully spend time with the beauty of creation in our own local environment". "When we experience the Earth as holy...our actions may change from control and destruction of the Earth to living in respect for and in communion with the Earth."

MEDITATION ON GOD’S LOVE THROUGH THE SACREDNESS OF SOIL

The “CONTEMPLATIO” in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius presents, in a contemplative form, the spirituality of finding and loving God in all things which is the lasting outcome of the entire “Spiritual Exercises”. The call is to image and see the way in which God loves and in turn be encouraged to love God, other people and the whole of creation in that way.

A quote from Thomas Berry in his book, “The Great Work”: *“Earth as we know it came into being through the four great components: land (soil), water, air, and life, all interacting in the light and energy of the sun.*

Although there was a sequence in the formation of the land sphere, the atmosphere, the water sphere, and the life sphere, these have so interacted with one another in the shaping of the earth that we must somehow think of these as all present to one another and interacting from the beginning 13.4 billion years ago.^

INTRODUCTION

In this meditation prayer exercise, you are invited to ponder God’s gift of soil. As an aid in your prayer meditation, place a small amount of soil in a container on the table beside you. Become aware that among God’s gifts of creation, one of the greatest is the soil. Studies on how a society uses soil leads to a conclusion as to what its future will be. The land carries the topsoil and the topsoil carries an immense variety of living beings including human beings.

In “Laudato Si”, Pope Francis writes: *“Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware - to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering and to discover what each one of us can do about it”.*

“Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life... Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts”. (“The Sense of Wonder” by Rachel Carson)

IGNATIUS’ FOCUS AND GRACE

As I continue my faith journey of God’s love and deepening life in me, I recall what Ignatius points out and I will pray for the grace for an intimate knowledge of all the goods that God lovingly shares with me. Filled with gratitude, I want to be empowered to respond and act just as totally in my love and service.

- In Ignatius’ first point he asks us to recall all the blessings of creation and redemption and how God has bestowed all these, but most of all the gift of the Divine.
- In the second point, we are invited to turn towards the world to give thanks for plants, animals, and all diversity of nature in its richness, and then to see ourselves as images of God within that creation.

- In the third point Ignatius focuses on the work and value of all creatures and how God cares, conserves, and nourishes them.
- The final point sees all blessings and gifts, all virtues and life, as coming from God, like warmth from the sun or water from a fountain (Sp Ex. 230 – 237).

All this is given as a specific example of Ignatius' own motto, "*To find God in all things*".

PREPARATORY PRAYER

I prepare myself by taking the usual time to place myself reverently in the presence of God, asking that everything in my day is directed more and more to God's praise and service.

STEPS IN THE FIRST PROLOGUE:

First Step:

In my imagination I place myself before the Trinity. All around me I see the saints and martyrs, persons that have touched my life and have inspired me with their insights and reverence for the Community of Life through God's creation... they are smiling and seem to be saying to me that we are soul-mates.

Second Step:

I may want to take some soil from the container and hold it while considering the biological diversity described as "*the variability among living organisms from all sources, whether earthly, water or fish*". It reflects God's diversity within all species and ecosystems. Soil is one of nature's most complex ecosystems and one of the most diverse habitats on earth. These organisms, which interact and contribute to the global cycles makes all life possible. Nowhere in nature are species so densely packed as in soil communities; however, this biodiversity is little known as it is underground and largely invisible to the human eye.

Third Step:

I want to have an intimate understanding of myself so that I, with the soil, deepening the awareness that we are all interconnected and all life, is gift: Acknowledging God's love and not wanting any more than that love for my sacred journey.

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 8:15... "*But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.*"

CONVERSATION

I recall the activity of the Trinity as they initiate the vast evolutionary process, which results in the formation of millions of galaxies, stars, and planets, as well as me. Recall also, the presence of Jesus Christ who has given me and the community of life meaning and fulfillment. I will

reflect on my experience of the Trinity's presence in the special persons and occasions of my life. I ponder, with great feeling; on how much the Trinity has done for me, and the community of life, how much they have given me, and finally on how much they desire to give me their very selves. Then I will reflect upon myself and consider, according to all reason and justice, what I ought to offer to the Trinity, that is, all I possess, and my own being as well.

Moved with great love, I will make this offering of myself:

TAKE AND RECEIVE

Take, O Trinity, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Trinity, I return it. All is Yours. Dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me your love and your grace. That is enough for me.

One could end the meditation by praying the Lord's Prayer.