MARYKNOLL SISTERS LAND ETHIC

As Maryknoll Sisters our sense of mission impels us to live in a way that testifies to the integrity and sacredness of all of creation. We are called to relearn our place in the Universe[1] and be enlightened by a worldview in which land once again is seen as sacred[2]. By embracing the self-organizing principles of the cosmos, as we state in our 2002 General Assembly proceedings, we are called to see land as subject rather than object or commodity. Our endorsement of the Earth Charter similarly invites us to live out of a new sense of being members of one Earth Community.

We are privileged, as a Congregation, to participate within numerous cultures around the world. We have learned from these many cultures their own reverence of Earth, the Cosmos as Holy. We witness to the increased suffering of millions of people - a suffering related to the rampant degradation of Earth and its gifts. We likewise witness to the destruction and diminishment of other life forms and elements in the web of life that sustains us. We share in the wisdom of these cultures and have been sensitized to the centrality of land in many people's lives. Likewise we recognize that we hold precious land that is host to ourselves and the larger web of life.

We concur that a land ethic enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soil, air, water, plants and animals and thereby reflects the existence of an ecological conscience.[3] May the beliefs and commitments to action articulated here serve as an important guide for our choices as we seek to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community that a land ethic implies.[4]

We believe that creation is a primary source of revelation of the Divine Presence. Earth is sacred, and the extinction of life forms and eco-systems through overuse and irresponsible exploitation is a destruction of manifestations of the Divine Presence.

We believe we are called to a greater consciousness of the interconnectedness and oneness of the universe of which Earth is a part. This consciousness continues to evolve. Emerging from the spiritualities of prophets, sages, mystics and indigenous peoples throughout the ages, it is strengthened by present day theological and scientific insights and discoveries, and by our day to day experience with the people with whom we are living and working.

We believe as we journey from our focus upon the human to an earth-cosmos centered community, we are challenged to a radical transformation in our understanding of the place of the human within creation. Such an understanding impels us to witness to a deeper consciousness of justice as right relationship between the human and the rest of creation, thus respecting the integral human-cosmos relationship that exists.

We believe we are called to live in a sustainable manner, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

We believe we are called to be a community that not only exercises faithful care of Earth's gifts, but also co-creates along with the Divine. We hold these blessings in trust in a spirit of solidarity with each other and especially the poor. We desire to live in harmonious partnership with all of creation and thus be faithful to the mission of Jesus to which we have been called.

As participants in One Sacred Earth Community we commit ourselves to:

- deepen our understanding of the beliefs articulated here through study, dialogue, prayer, action and reflection;

- apply these beliefs to our land use decisions.

- be guided by ethical principles and responsible research that reflect our deep reverence for Earth and our clear commitment to a right relationship with the Earth community in our decisions for land use.

- consider our commitment to the poor and their needs in any land decisions.

- be attuned to and guided by the land ethic of host cultures in which we live and minister.

- consider the good of the land as an important criterion in any land use decisions.

- work to protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.[5]

- cooperate and collaborate with other persons and groups that are engaged in awareness raising and advocacy around these issues.

[1] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way to the Future*, (New York: Bell Tower, 1999). pp. 159-165.
[2] Jeanne Clark OP, "Spirituality and Land", *Religious Communities and Real Property – Property Decision Making with Ecological Conscience*, (NATRI, 2003), p. 6.
[3] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, (The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1970), pp. 239, 258.
[4] Ibid., p. 262.
[5] "Principles - II Ecological Integrity", *The Earth Charter*, 2000.