

The IHM Congregation and the Earth Charter

Endorsing the Earth Charter



Prior to Earth Day 2004, a task force convened by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan was formed to consider endorsing the Earth Charter as a corporate stance. Such a stance seemed in keeping with the community's long tradition of action for justice, peace and sustainability.

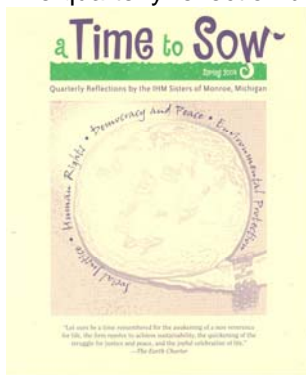
Members of the community were invited into a process to discern endorsement. Each person was given a packet that included a copy of the Earth Charter; reflections and prayers regarding each of the principles of the Charter along with suggested actions; a document correlating IHM beliefs and values with the principles of the Earth Charter; a history of previous IHM corporate stances; and an individual endorsement form. Members of the community discerned individually and in small groups. Comparing position statements from the IHM tradition with Charter principles proved to be the most valuable tool for discernment.

A minimum of 60% of the 371 people involved was necessary to take a corporate stance. After careful discernment, 99% voted in favor and the endorsement was proclaimed at a 2004 Earth Day celebration. The process heightened the community's awareness of the interdependence and common needs of all species on Earth – including humans – and the profound challenges that face us all.

Living the Principles

The endorsement both reflected and deepened IHM commitment to build a culture of peace and right relationship with the community of life on Earth. Educational efforts making use of the Earth Charter were soon underway – each expressing the desire to “live into” the endorsement as a corporate stance.

- Several **religious communities** who learned of the IHM endorsement of the Earth Charter as a corporate stance asked for copies of the IHM discernment materials for ideas to begin their own discernment process.
- The quarterly reflection bulletin ***A Time to Sow***, written by former IHM President Mary McCann, invites readers to awaken to the interdependence and perilous situation of the Earth community. Like the Earth Charter's preamble and conclusion, it is eye-opening and motivational in tone. Each issue offers a reflection with a cover graphic, questions for reflection, and related resources. The publication is read by members, associates, employees, donors, visitors, friends, and subscribers. The spring 2004 issue featured the Earth Charter and urged readers to ponder the Charter and the personal challenges it presents.



- When the **IHM Web site** was redesigned in 2005, the materials for justice, peace and sustainability were assembled using a parallel structure to the Earth Charter. A

section on the endorsement was part of the introduction with links to a downloadable copy of the Charter and an annotated bibliography highlighting resources for further exploration (http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Justice_Peace_and_Sustainability/The_IHM_Commitment/earthcharter.asp). Major categories were developed with the themes of Ecological Integrity; Social Justice; Economic Justice; and Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace, each containing individual pages on a variety of topics. Each topic presents a summary of the issue, examples of the IHM

response, prayer materials, an annotated bibliography, and suggestions for actions web viewers can take.

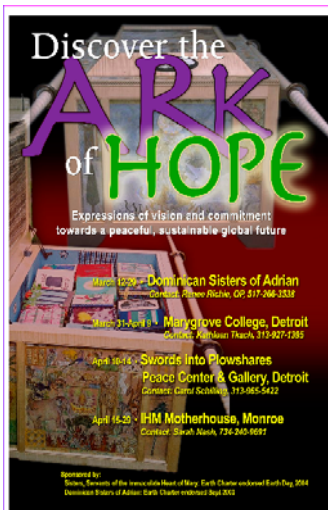
- The IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office sends out a **weekly electronic action announcement** to all members of the community. These alerts feature three easy, Web-based actions on a global, national and local issue and are introduced with a quote from IHM documents or the Earth Charter that illuminates one of the actions in the announcement. The most recent IHM Action Announcement can be found at http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Justice_Peace_and_Sustainability/actionalerts.asp.
- In 2003, the community finished a **sustainable renovation of the Motherhouse and campus** [http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Sustainable Community/Sustainable Renovation/sustainrenovaton.asp](http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/Sustainable_Community/Sustainable_Renovation/sustainrenovaton.asp). Within two years several thousand people had toured the building to learn from the landmark renovation how to tread more lightly on Earth. Each visitor received a copy of the Earth Charter. Currently, over 500 people of all walks of life, ages, race, nationality, religion and socio-economic status tour the IHM Motherhouse annually.

- The IHM Sisters partnered with the Adrian Dominican Sisters to bring the **Ark of Hope**

(www.arkofhope.org) to Michigan in 2007. Created by artists Sally Linder and Kevin Jenness, the ark houses a handmade copy of the Earth Charter and places it in a reverent and artistic context.

Thousands of persons were impacted by this educational experience at four diverse host sites.

The **Temenos Book Project**, a community art process accompanying the Ark of Hope, engaged aesthetic valuation, heightened learning, and embodied a tangible experience of global solidarity while celebrating Earth's diversity.





For the 2007 **Earth Day Celebration**, the IHM community joined the Great Lakes Women of Gaia singing group in an interactive presentation of the values and principals of the Earth Charter. The ensemble sang songs based on the Earth Charter interspersed with stories of hope that demonstrated particular Earth Charter principles. The celebration concluded with a Fair Trade coffee tasting and tours of the sustainably renovated Motherhouse.

Using art and music as part of the ongoing education about and formation in the Earth Charter stimulated the senses and the spirit in the participants and encouraged new perimeters of transformation.



- Each month the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office posts an **educational bulletin board** at the IHM Motherhouse on a different topic. In April 2007, the bulletin board featured the Earth Charter poster and images of IHM Sisters and Associates "in action" living out Earth Charter

principles.

- Many sisters and associates extended the community's endorsement of the Earth Charter by sharing it in their **families and ministerial positions**. As a result, IHM partners have studied and endorsed the Charter. Others have participated in Earth Charter summits stimulating actions such as educating a city council, initiating a local chapter of the Earth Scouts, and holding dialogues on conflict resolution with youth. Teachers of grandchildren of IHM Associates have been asked to work the Charter into student lessons. Pastoral ministers and interfaith ministerial groups have discussed the Charter.

- In 2006, **members of the IHM community involved in education** used Earth Charter Web resources to begin integrating it into their curricula. As a result, several hundred students within 11 metro Detroit grade schools learned about the Earth Charter, created artistic representations of Charter principles in action and received copies of the version of the Charter adapted for young people. Similar activities were held in high schools and colleges.



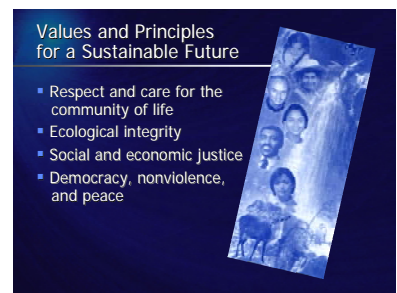
In 2007, a focused conversation between IHM leadership and IHM sponsored school administrators examined how the Earth Charter might be more fully integrated within each of the sponsored educational communities.

- **Presentations** on the Earth Charter and presentations using the Earth Charter to contextualize an issue were developed. IHM Sisters conducted a workshop, "The Earth Charter: A Tool for Promoting Sustainable Living," at the 2006 Great Lakes Bioneers conference in Detroit. Reviewing the preamble and a short introductory video, their facilitated discussion centered around the values and principles participants experienced locally and their dream for the future of their work.



The IHM Monroe Campus Long Range Master Plan team routinely makes presentations about the IHM sustainable renovation. The slide show presentation that accompanies these talks includes the Earth Charter as a way to understand our interconnectedness with all of creation and as a guide to become a restorative and benign presence on Earth. Copies of the Earth Charter are often distributed to participants and prayers at the beginning of meetings are drawn from the Earth Charter.

The Earth Charter was also the context for the second Midwest Green Building Conference in 2007 held at the IHM Motherhouse. The 200 attendees received a copy of the Earth Charter and each keynote speaker and workshop presenter received the Earth Charter preamble mounted on a plaque.



The Four Stories

As Catholic sisters, the IHM community has a long-standing commitment to spirituality, justice, and education and a long history of ministry in those areas. In 2006, the community made a commitment to seeing themselves and the changing world and church through storytelling: stories inherited and stories shared and passed on. For many people – and for Earth itself – the story of our world that we used to tell is not working any longer, so we need to author a new story that is inclusive, dynamic and genuine.

The community decided together that a combination of stories would best fit them moving into the future and claiming and using their collective voice for their deepest concerns. The framework they chose was to interweave the Universe story (14 billion-year-old story), the Christian story, (4,000-year-old story), the

IHM story of a community of women (167-year-old story) and the Earth Charter that connects all the justice issues into a comprehensive whole to image all of life interconnected and fecund.

The bigger spiritual stories undergird all of the community's work for justice. The Earth Charter makes this work concrete, global, and inclusive while clarifying the care for Earth as an ultimate "pro-life" stance for all living beings. The principles of sustainability must mean Earth sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability and balance in the whole dynamics.

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