

A Call to Integrate Faith, Ecology and the Global Economy

As hope-filled people, we stand in awe of Earth's goodness and its capacity to provide abundant life for all God's creation. We recognize our interconnection with Earth -- with air, water, land, plants and other creatures. We recognize the dignity of the human person as an individual and as part of a community. We embrace our power and responsibility to create a human economy that fits within Earth's ecological boundaries, more authentically serves human needs and builds community.

We envision:

- A new economic model that embodies social and ecological values bound by Earth's biophysical limits.
- A sufficiency-based economy where all people, regardless of gender, race or other characteristics, equitably share access to Earth's gifts that nourish and sustain them: nutritious food, clean water, suitable shelter; where "development" is measured by a society's success in increasing human well being while preserving ecological balance rather than by its gross domestic product.
- A just global distribution of resources, knowledge and technology such that well-being flourishes in communities of less industrialized nations that have experienced "underdevelopment" – and "de-growth," or downsizing occurs in communities in industrialized nations that use a disproportionate share of Earth's resources.
- A world where all have secure, meaningful, and ecologically responsible livelihoods and where human activity, based on cooperation, promotes ecological regeneration, the preservation of beauty and the restoration of previous damage.
- A "closed loop" real economy where recycling and reuse are maximized.
- People with sufficient resources, opportunities, freedom, and time to care for one another, engage in civic life, expand their creativity, and deepen their spirituality.
- Communities living in peace with sufficient public resources and freely shared knowledge to ensure health and wholeness for Earth and all its inhabitants.
- Governance that is participatory and transparent, through which policy decisions are made as locally as possible, consistent with the reality that every locality is part of a global society.

Yet we witness:

- The destructive power of a growth-driven economic model that ignores Earth's limits and its need to rest and regenerate.
- The valuing of money and material goods more than humans and ecosystems.
- The inherent violence of an economy that grows along with the wealth of a few individuals and corporations while the natural world and human well being – the clearest signs of God's bounty – suffer and deteriorate.
- The use of international financial institutions, corporate lobbying and marketing, think tanks, major media and military force to secure the wealth and power of a small part of society while a great many others, especially women and people of color are often excluded.
- "Free trade" and economic globalization that increase ecological depletion and leave masses of people vulnerable through deeper poverty and insufficient access to food, water, education and health care.

- The loss of people, cultures, species and traditional knowledge forced aside as our lives are dominated by a world view that seeks economic growth regardless of the consequences;
- Soul-deadening over-consumption and the endless quest for “more” that paralyzes far too many people in wealthier societies.

We also witness the sheer increase in throughput of material and energy in the economy due to expanding consumer demand and economic growth that contribute to climate change, species extinctions, loss of biodiversity, depletion of freshwater and other resources, ocean dead zones, topsoil degradation, deforestation, dying coral reefs and the decimation of ocean fish stocks.

We stand firm in our commitment to a new way of life and a different economy, based on the integrity and dignity of all creation, the common good, ecological health and resilience, sufficiency, equality, solidarity, caring for the most vulnerable and impoverished, and decision-making at the most local level possible. This will require innumerable inter-related changes; among them, the four that follow will serve to guide our work:

- 1) **Paradigm Shift in Mindset and Values:** An essential shift from an ethic of exploitation to an ethic of right relationship is essential for individuals and for society. This will entail change from a focus on material goods to holistic well-being; from excess to sufficiency; from exclusion to inclusion; from competition to cooperation; from pursuing privilege to serving the common good; from the pre-eminence of humanity to the reverence for all life.

Toward this end we will be guided by the wisdom of our sacred scriptures and religious traditions, especially Sabbath traditions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy and the inclusive table of Jesus, which

- provides enough for everyone, with no one storing up more than is needed;
- cares for the widow, orphan, stranger and traveler;
- honors a weekly Sabbath, providing rest and human restraint from busy, frenetic economic activities;
- allows the land to rest every seven years;
- decrees a Jubilee every 50 years, when slaves are freed, debts cancelled and families have their land restored to them; and
- models the breaking of bread, by creating strong communities built on care for one another.

- 2) **Public policies for an Economy of Right Relationship:** Starting from the deep recognition that the economy must fit within Earth’s limits – where resources are not used faster than they can be regenerated and wastes are not deposited faster than they can be safely assimilated. Policies must change to move toward a steady state economy in overdeveloped industrial countries and sustainable development in impoverished countries. Current institutions and rules must change so that individuals, communities and whole societies can participate equitably in the economy and share in Earth's bounty. Financial institutions should embrace the principle of subsidiarity, allowing decisions to be made at the most local level possible. Priority should be given to policies that distribute wealth widely and decentralize economic power.

Toward this end we will seek to understand more fully what transformations are required to attain economic right relationship. We will promote a serious reorientation of the global economy away from growth and toward human development. We will pursue changes in laws, policies, international agreements, and institutions to create a more durable, resilient and fair economy. We will examine our lifestyles and decrease consumption. We will advocate for sustainable levels of resource use and safe quantities of waste production, including equitably assigned reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

- 3) An Economy of Thriving and Resilient Communities:** In living the new paradigm and strengthening its hold on society we will shift from a perception of ourselves as independent individuals to ourselves as *interdependent* members of thriving communities. All have something to contribute as we give and receive gifts and talents among neighbors through barter systems, cooperatives and worker-owned businesses. Community-based investment and economic development will help individuals to deepen their connection with the place where they live and will keep resources circulating locally. This will build community assets and strengthen social ties. We will embrace subsidiarity – decisions will be made at the local level by the very people whose lives are impacted most.

Toward this end we will learn more from the sustainable community-level examples known well by indigenous peoples and already functioning in our local communities in the United States and around the world, spread those ideas, participate in them ourselves and express our solidarity by supporting their efforts.

- 4) Return of Corporations to their proper place in society:** In order to achieve the changes described above, it is clear that we must decrease the amount of influence that corporations wield in government and society in general. The reigning forces in our world should serve the interests of the common good, rather than the private interests of a wealthy few. Corporations should be accountable not only to shareholders, but also to, their workers, regulatory bodies, the communities in which they are embedded, and the natural world.

Toward this end we will study the history and design of the corporation to better understand its proper role in a just world. We will declare a separation of corporation and state and work for initiatives to decrease corporate influence in government, the media and our lives. We will work to stop reckless financial practices that exploit natural resources and people. We will help cultivate financial institutions that respect Earth's limits and ensure economic participation with dignity for all people.

Our call to others: Grounded in our faith and speaking from our core principles and values, we call on people of good will to join us in re-examining the false panacea of a development model dependent on over-consumption. We seek a new understanding of the proper place for humans in the created world and right relationships within the human community and between the human and Earth communities. We place our hope in God's grace and the human capacity to face all these challenges with innovation, faithfulness, and creativity and to ensure the common good so that all living things might flourish.

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Endorsements:

Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, Oak View, CA
Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy
Holy Cross International Justice Office
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Spirituality and Ecological Hope
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Justice and Peace Network
Sisters of Mercy - Mercy International Association