

REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A PLAN OF ACTION

SOCIETY OF JESUS



OREGON PROVINCE

SOCIETY OF JESUS, OREGON PROVINCE
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Sustainable Development is a commitment to respect and care for the community of life. It is economic growth that promotes the values of human rights, care for the natural world, and the striving for the common good of the whole earth community, especially the poor and most vulnerable. It involves sustaining the present generation without imposing long-term costs or penalties on future generations. It replaces the use of non-renewable resources with renewable ones and reduces the consumption of all resources. It entails reuse, recovery, and recycling wherever possible; and replenishment or restoration of the natural balances affected by our actions. It implies sound life-cycle planning and economics—economics that truly reflect the environmental and human costs of our technologies and decisions. Sustainable development will succeed only if it expands to include a vision of sustainable communities which hold all creation as sacred.

OUR MISSION TODAY

Rachel Carson's 1962 bestseller, *Silent Spring*, detailed the harmful effects of pesticides and launched the West's modern-day environmental movement. Her theories were violently attacked by both corporations and government agencies at the time. The truth of her research has been vindicated by history, revealing her prescience. Today almost 45 years later, serious environmental degradation on land and sea threatens all life systems. The current challenges are so significant that our Province apostolic efforts must be re-envisioned.

The Oregon Province established criteria for the selection of ministries 22 years ago. We chose to promote works: that are collaborative, that form an apostolic laity, that involve solidarity with the poor, that are evangelizing, and that advance our intellectual and spiritual charism. Twenty years ago we published the *Paths for the Oregon Province*. It defined how these criteria should be applied in our apostolic works.

This new document on Sustainable Development is not a departure from the path or criteria of the past. It simply widens our vision by bringing the critical problems of the environment into focus. We have the Colombian Jesuits to thank for helping us see the deeper meaning of our justice commitment. The renewal of the original 2000 Twinning Agreement states in part:

*A third level of exchange seeks to establish in each Province a regional apostolic work, in which both Jesuit ministries and those of our lay apostolic companions are integrated into one mission....The Regional Sustainable Development Program, inaugurated in 2004 by the Colombian Province in the southern part of that country, and the program that will be begun by the Oregon Province, are both exceptional opportunities for the this type of research and cooperation.*¹

The Oregon Province Task Force appointed to advance the Twinning Agreement was asked by Provincial Fr. John Whitney to develop a framework for collaboration with the Colombian Jesuits in their work on Regional Sustainable Development. They were also given the task to imagine the criteria established in 1984 in light of developing new apostolic initiatives in ecological justice in our own region.

This document establishes a definition of Sustainable Development for our own region. It also puts forth criteria for projects and processes for advancing those projects, which, with our Ignatian perspective, can be seen as latent in the criteria chosen in 1984. The Task Force invites us to reflect on the fact that solidarity with the poor and marginalized of the world must now also include a vision of the earth that sustains us-- a planet for which we have been made stewards. They call us as well to look beyond the

crises to the cultural, spiritual, and economic opportunities that the environmental challenges present.

Today there is a convergence on the part of critical thinkers in both the secular and sacred sciences who hold that the just society depends on rediscovering our intimate link with the earth and respecting the miraculous web of life that holds us in her care. Pope John Paul II said in his message for the World Day of Peace:

*Protection of the environment is not an option. In the Christian perspective it forms an integral part of our personal life and of life in society. Not to care for the environment is to ignore the Creator's plan for **all** of creation and results in an alienation of the human person.*²

We are all grateful for the work of so many Jesuits and lay partners in the last 22 years who have helped implement a unique vision of our work in the Northwest. But now we must continue our journey by widening the path we chose in 1984. The time to act is now.

Let us challenge each other to incorporate these new criteria in our institutional planning, ministries, and spiritual works. And let us do this work in active collaboration with the Society of Jesus in Colombia, with other faith groups, and with our regional partners in civil society. It is a holy work. And as Pope John Paul forcefully states, protecting the environment is the only option for those who desire to follow the path of Christ in the world today.

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*Feast of St. Francis Xavier
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¹ Renewal of the Twinning Agreement, 2004

² Address for the World Day of Peace, 1990. Pope John Paul II

THE CONTEXT

The Oregon Province of the Jesuits has committed itself to regional sustainable development as part of our Twinning Agreement with the Jesuits of Colombia¹. By any measure, we are late starters in this vital project. The crisis of environmental damage, increasing global warming, and the permanent destruction of resources and species is upon us.

The Jesuit Social Justice Secretariat just this year affirmed that unless global issues “are squarely faced by all peoples together, our world will not be headed on the path of equality, peace, and sustainable development.”²

This most recent Jesuit document advances the Jesuit commitment made already in GC34: “We need to promote attitudes and policies which will create responsible relationships to the environment of our shared world, of which we are only the stewards.” And an effective stewardship implies that “full human liberation for the poor and for us all lies in the development of *communities of solidarity* at the grass-roots and nongovernmental, as well as the political level, where we can all work together towards human development.”³

Over a three-year period, the Colombian Jesuits clearly defined regional sustainable development for their region and have launched a “community of solidarity” project called Suyusama⁴ in southern Colombia that seeks to foster economic development, stabilize rural culture and communities and promote environmental justice and food security for a future, peaceful Colombia. In a similar manner, this document intends to inspire the works and apostolates of the Oregon Province to conceive of a comparable project(s) within our own region.

In order for both provinces to effectively collaborate, we need to understand the existing models of sustainable development and then elaborate what our Catholic understandings of sustainable development offer. This document seeks to accomplish both these tasks. Our goal in doing this is to share resources and insights, as well as to engage in dialogue with committed people of differing perspectives. Most of all, we seek to provide a vision for the Oregon Province in solidarity with the efforts of the Colombian Jesuits. Our vision includes programmatic pathways to implement a new, long-term commitment to building communities of healing and justice, grounded in a theology of creation that embraces God’s wondrous ongoing care.⁵

THE CURRENT MODEL

Although the term “sustainable development” has been discussed and debated for decades, it has remained for many people as one of those fuzzy concepts that perhaps seems too enormous and too nebulous to truly understand, let alone to implement. Much of what has been written and accomplished throughout the world during the past two decades has relied on a lengthy document prepared by the United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), following more than three years of study of the long-term global and environmental challenges facing our planet.

Their 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, articulated a simple philosophy of sustainable development, stating that it is a “process of change in which the use of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change all enhance the potential to meet human needs both today and tomorrow... [It] meets the needs of the present without compromising our ability to meet those of the future.” The Commission amplified this definition by stating further that it embodies two key components: the fact that essential needs, particularly those of the world’s poor, *must* be met; and that there are *limitations* imposed by technology and society on the ability to meet those needs.

In fact, this most influential definition of sustainable development⁶ depends upon a “lowest common denominator” approach--enabling all people of good will to collaborate on any process. One of the assumptions behind this definition, however, is a narrowly anthropological one. By speaking only of “human needs,” the definition assumes that the natural world exists only to serve human needs, rather than having its own integrity and beauty which is to be honored and protected (an ecological perspective).

This assumption also underlies our emerging one-world secular technological culture. Of course, science and technology are natural and good for advancing human culture. But when those who develop and use the technology operate out of the dominant world view of free-market capitalism, then its individualistic, consumerist, materialistic, and secularist assumptions can undermine technology’s promise to lead to sustainable development.

INDIVIDUALISM

If there is no common good which motivates one to make individual sacrifices, then maximal exploitation of the environment for my own good and my immediate family will be rampant. In such a world, a few live luxuriously and the rest in penury. Further, individualism cuts one off from one’s ancestors in the past and progeny in the future.

CONSUMERISM

Aggressive marketing enlarges desires for more and more goods. Increasing appetite, in turn, fuels the economy. And, as first world economic systems reach the limits of their expansion, they reach out through advertising into second and third world markets. But the world has already reached its carrying capacity in exploitation of non-renewable resources and in gaseous pollution of the ecosphere. Sustainability now demands retrenchment which most assumptions of free-market capitalism cannot support.

MATERIALISM

Materialism as a belief system holds that physical matter is all that exists. And if all that exists is material then I will equate who I am with what (the material) I have so that the more I have the more I am - to my ultimate dissatisfaction and the tragic deprivation of others in need. If all that counts is enjoyment of material goods, then retrenchment is neither desirable nor possible. Materialism is rampant in the modern West in spite of the Christian heritage most of us profess.

SECULARISM

While a materialist has no place for God; a secularist may relegate God to a spiritual realm which does not in any way influence the unfolding of our physical world or the development and correction of its cultural arrangements. In a secularist world the innate human spiritual drive is inflated into absolutist positions in politics and economics, with sometimes truly demonic effect on the cosmos and human life.

A CATHOLIC MODEL

Although the lowest common denominator approach coming from the UN's 1987 document has been a foundation and starting point for many organizations or individuals promoting sustainable development for the past twenty years, much more has been written about what this simple definition or concept does not provide: the many dimensions of sustainable development perhaps implied but certainly not clearly stated in these few words. Our group has added its own voice to this amplification process, mentioning concepts and principles including: human rights, justice, common good, cultural communities, philosophy, theology, God's plan for the universe, preservation and repair of natural systems, relationships between spirit and matter, sharing resources and wealth, respect for diversity and the community of life, peace and nonviolence, to list just some of the ideas offered.

As a starting point to capture some, but not all, of these concepts, the group offers a brief, pragmatic definition that suggests concrete steps or initiatives that would direct human efforts in a sustainable direction:

Sustainable development is a commitment to respect and care for the community of life. It is economic growth that promotes the values of human rights, care for the natural world, and the striving for the common good of the whole earth community, especially the poor and most vulnerable. It involves sustaining the present generation without imposing long-term costs or penalties on future generations. It replaces the use of non-renewable resources with renewable ones and reduces the consumption of all resources. It entails reuse, recovery, and recycling wherever possible; and replenishment or restoration of the natural balances affected by our actions. It implies sound life-cycle planning and economics—economics that truly reflect the environmental and human costs of our technologies and decisions. Sustainable development will succeed only if it expands to include a vision of sustainable communities which hold all creation as sacred.

OUR VISION

We recognize the inherent tension between such a holistic, sacramental vision of sustainability and other existing models.⁷ However, a Jesuit, Catholic perspective assumes that God's plan and God's will are definitive in working out human destiny and that this destiny is inextricably linked with the interdependence of all creation. Thus individual persons and human communities as spiritual, religious entities serve God who is both transcendent and immanent when their cherishing and fostering of the material realm reflects the truth of the interdependence of all creation.⁸

This religious vision embodies four related factors: the *cosmos* as God's creation and dwelling place, the *individual human person*, the *community* in which that person lives, and *God* as the originator, the facilitator, and the goal of all cosmic and human striving.

THE COSMOS

The Cosmos is the creation of a God who loves it and dwells within it (Wis 11:24). The cosmos participates in the very being of God. In fact, Ignatius of Loyola asserts that God dwells in creatures and labors in them (*Sp. Ex.* §235-36). This indwelling, in turn, invites our reverence for the very being of the mineral, vegetative, and animal world in which God is present, not simply to be used but to be contemplated, cherished, and revered. God's taking human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth further heightens this presence and sacralizes the whole cosmos by his body. The sacredness of the cosmos carries us beyond a narrowly anthropological view of nature as the outer layer of my skin, to a view of the sacramental presence of God in all creation that has been created *through and for* Christ.

Further, the trust God gives humans for the rest of creation (Gen 1:26)⁹ means they are to serve God's harmony in the cosmos, not just for their own benefit, but also for the sustenance of the interrelationship of all creation. Sustainable development results

from an attitude which both uses and treasures all elements of the cosmos as God's presence.

INDIVIDUAL PERSONS

Individual Persons, uniquely made in God's image, have a sacred trust to care for all God's creation. Their very nature, spiritual and material, requires holistic development that sustains both material and spiritual human needs. Their role confers on them rights such as the right to religious freedom and the right to private property by which the world can be developed in an integral manner. But while these individual rights are sovereign, they are also conditioned by human nature as intrinsically social. All human persons come into being through a process of social loving and find their true perfection in helping that community grow. Every person is a product of society and a creative contributor to it. Consequently, everyone has a right to live in a freely chosen culture and to develop the authentic values and understandings of that culture.¹⁰

This vision is grounded in persons, rather than individuals. *Individual* means that one is separated and achieves identity separate from others; while *person* means one is in relationship, achieves identity as being subject and object of knowing and loving relationships. This emphatic shift moves from "I" in a competing series of "I's" to "We" in a collaborative enterprise which is one. Thus *persons* participate in developing self by developing the entire human community and the ecosphere in a sustainable fashion.

THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

Although persons must seek their own individual goods, they must also realize their individual goods as perfected by participation in the *common good*. Sustainable development results from a willing retrenchment from superfluities in favor of those who lack necessities or will lack them in the future. Indeed, from a sacramental perspective, such altruism not only creates more opportunity for all but also increases the joy for those who simplify their lives.

Further, Catholic tradition, arising from as early as the 3rd century, understands the limited resources of the cosmos given by God to all. So the world's resources are given for *common use*. While private property may be the best way for the universe to be developed, it may also force some to live in penury while others enjoy luxury. In that case, government may appropriate some private property and redistribute it in such a way as to promote jobs and reasonable self-sufficiency for all.

For these spiritually grounded reasons we could expect that, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness," namely the fruits of the Spirit, will be more present in communities successfully committed to sustainable development. (cf. Galatians 5:22)

GOD

God created this world for harmonious development coupled with free human guidance. Besides pronouncing the world *good*, God revealed through the Ten

Commandments that doing justice to one's fellow human is being authentically religious. Jesus, drawing upon the Jewish tradition, teaches that love of one's neighbor is integral to love of God as one's final destiny. Sustainable development follows when humans use the environment sparingly, so that its fruits endure and are available to others and to subsequent generations.

But God plays an even more integral part of sustainable development for God alone can satisfy the infinite desires of the human heart and spirit. "Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."¹¹

Relationship with God is thus the supreme enjoyment. In God, having what they need, all persons in the developed world can flourish personally, socially and spiritually on reduced consumption of resources which sustainable development will demand in the future. Ultimately, only those who have found a spiritual center, no matter how they identify their God, will have the wisdom and the freedom to make the sacrifices which make development sustainable.

These perspectives stand in contrast to most other regnant models of development which are too often governed by individualism, consumerism, materialism and secularism.

A CLOSING REFLECTION

How these assumptions or values of the Catholic tradition should be worked out in the practice of sustainable development will depend largely on the assumptions of the participants and the circumstances of each project. There is agreement with criteria developed by other, not specifically religious, groups concerned with the environment.

The Earth Charter¹² for example proposes four overarching ethical principles for action by all of society:

- respecting and caring for the community of life,
- protecting and restoring ecological integrity,
- promoting social and economic justice, and
- strengthening democracy, non-violence, and peace.

The revelation and development of the Catholic tradition affirms these principles, and deepens "respect" into reverence, "equality" into mutuality, "rights" into compassion, and has provided the divine motivation which makes of all the Charter's imperatives true possibilities.

Our Ignatian spirituality affirms the indwelling of God in all creatures and laboring in them out of love for us.¹³ Consequently we are both stewards and participants respecting, caring and laboring with God in this community of creation.

“We Jesuit apostolic partners,” as the Social Justice Secretariat explains, “are blessed by our connectedness with each other, with the marginalized, and with the global actors. We are called to be bridge builders. With our personal vocations, our institutional apostolic bases, and our networks, we are well positioned to answer that call, bridging global chasms and local divisions. These bridges can be built only if we give all that is ours, even our very selves to the task.”¹⁴

The collaborative efforts of the Oregon and Colombia Provinces are great exemplars of this bridge building and of the substantial resources in vision, commitment, courage, and fidelity available for a sustainable future that will advance the universal good. And the more universal the good is, the more it is Divine.⁵

CRITERIA AND PROJECTS

We recommend that a sustainable development project for the Oregon Province apostolates will, therefore, have the following criteria:

A. Criteria for a Regional Sustainable Development Project

- correlate with the service of faith and the promotion of justice, as nuanced in GC34;
- seek solidarity with the poor and vulnerable in society;
- enable us to actualize sustainable development as described above from a regional perspective yet have wider applications;
- bridge the tensions in sustainability between the existing models and those inspired by a spiritual/religious vision;
- model empowerment and subsidiarity;
- promote sustainable lifestyles;
- invite dialogue and collaboration with all religious and secular groups interested in sustainable development: businesses, entrepreneurs, academic institutions and political entities in society—in effect, all groups that are integral to the right functioning of civil society in the region;
- include benchmarks for progress, reflection, experience, and readjustment, and demonstrate potential for replication by other groups, towns, cities.

B. Suggested Processes to Advance Regional Sustainable Development in Our Province

- **create a representative, province group to ensure education, advancement and implementation of projects;**
- **invite the Jesuit universities of the Oregon province to consider a joint interdisciplinary project on sustainable development;**
- **invite apostolic partners and institutions to construct all new building projects using sustainable criteria;**
- **include programs incorporating this spiritually holistic and sustainable worldview as one of the priorities for the assignment of Jesuits;**
- **network with other spiritual and religious groups to translate sustainable development into faith language and programs that focus on the poor.**

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Regional Sustainable development Program, inaugurated in 2004 by the Colombian Province in the southern part of that country, and the program that will be begun by the Oregon Province, are both exceptional opportunities for the this type of research and cooperation. Moreover, these two programs will be enriched by the experience of international cooperation that was begun several years ago by Seattle University in Nicaragua and by Gonzaga University in Colombia. (A Renewal of the Twinning Agreement, 2004).
- ² "Globalisation and Marginalisation" Our Global Apostolic Response (Social Justice Secretariat: Rome, February 2006). # 45-47. The same document claimed that catholicity marks the Church's "interconnectedness in which locally inculturated, global citizenship is the sine qua non for universal justice and peace." Catholicity reflects "the need for institutional cooperation across disciplines, cultures, religions, geographical boundaries, and economic interests."
- ³ "Our Mission and Justice #58-59," Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (Saint Louis, The Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1995) 43.
- ⁴ Suyusama is a quechua word meaning beautiful region.
- ⁵ (A Renewal of the Twinning Agreement, 2004).
- ⁶ Our Common Future. United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.
- ⁷ Individualistic, Consumerist, Materialist, and Secularist models described above.
- ⁸ Spiritual refers to human self-transcendence and human embodiment of one's ultimate value, and religious refers to cultural systems for dealing with that ultimate reality (for example, creed, code, and cult). See also "Our Mission and Justice, #9 "Ecological equilibrium and a sustainable, equitable use of the world's resources are important elements of justice towards all the communities in our present "global village." They are also matters of justice towards the future generations who will inherit whatever we leave them."
- ⁹ The Hebrew *radah* means the kind of dominion God exercises, and the kind the king exercises as God's vicegerent--- administration of justice for all, especially for the poor, the orphans, the widows, and aliens. The unfortunate translation of *radah* as dominion opened the door to exploitative domination of creation by humans. Contemporary Christian theology sees this human responsibility for the cosmos as stewardship, then as kinship, and, increasingly, as conscious care for a cosmic community in which humans are members.
- ¹⁰ For a thorough description of all these human rights see: "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations, 1948.
- ¹¹ The Confessions of St. Augustine; i. 1
- ¹² The Earth Charter is one important resource for a shared ethical vision and a way forward for the global community in light of the challenges facing our world. The worldwide Earth Charter Initiative website is <http://www.earthcharter.org> . The Earth Charter emerges from the 1987 UN World Commission on Environment and Development's call for a charter setting forth fundamental principles for sustainable development. An Earth Charter was part of the unfinished business of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and its drafting was taken up in 1994 by Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Rio Earth Summit and Mikhail Gorbachev, president of Green Cross International with support from the Dutch Government. The Earth Charter was finalized after a decade-long participatory, consultative process involving thousands of people and organizations, from all regions throughout the world, and embracing the views of different cultures and diverse sectors of society.
- ¹³ Second Point: The second, to look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand...Third Point: The third, to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth -- that is, behaves like one who labors -- as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc. (Spiritual Exercises 235-6)
- ¹⁴ "Globalisation and Marginalisation," # 128.
- ¹⁵ The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, [622; #8].

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