



ECONOMY OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

An Advent Reflection Guide for a New Economy

As we light the Advent candles each week, we hold out for the hope and promise that Jesus's birth represents. It is a time to reflect on what is possible - even if at first the challenges seem insurmountable.

We live in a time with great inequality and suffering. We witness the policies that put the rights of corporations before the rights of people. We witness the suffering felt by humankind and all creation. We witness that just less than one billion go hungry¹ and lack access to clean drinking water². We witness that more than 26 million people are internally displaced³ from disasters, climate change, conflicts, extractive industries, and other land disputes. We witness the melting of ice caps and loss of tropical forests.

Pope Francis spoke of income inequality in his Apostolic Exhortation *Joy of the Gospel*, "While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules."

But change is possible and is already underway in communities across the country and the world. Community supported agriculture farms, community-owned credit unions, and local and regional co-operatives are just a few examples of how people are birthing a new economy that is locally grown and in right relationship with creation and God's people.

The Faith Economy Ecology Transformation Working Group developed this four week advent series to help individuals, parishes, and religious communities to pray, reflect, and take actions to build towards the kingdom vision of right relationship. Each week features one of the principles from our statement, "A Call to Integrate Faith, Economy, and the Global Economy."⁴ Explore with us a paradigm shift in mindset and values, how to support and build resilient communities through our everyday activities, how to develop policies that put the needs of people and the Earth at the center, and that the possibility to rein in corporate power exists.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

A Paradigm Shift in Mindset and Values

REFLECTION

By Marianne Comfort, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Advent Readings: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7; Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

"Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind."

(Isaiah 64:5)

"Be watchful! Be alert!"

(Mark 13:33)

As we enter the Advent season, today's readings remind us both of our sinful ways and a better path forward if we're only fully awake to signs of God coming in our midst. Too often, we think of turning away from sin as an individual matter, a call to be a nicer person and to do works of charity. But Isaiah admonishes us that "good deeds" are worse than worthless if we don't consider the bigger context of what make us, collectively, "unclean." What if we looked at this Advent season as a time to consider systemic and structural sins, and to be alert to the ways in which our complicity is destroying the Earth and vulnerable people, communities and cultures?

Mercy Sister Ana Siufi of Argentina challenges people in the United States to look at economic policies and a market-driven system that are "destroying the world."⁵ "It is a system where the market rules completely, where the banks are being rescued instead of rescuing the billion people who die of hunger," she laments.

In Advent, we need not be left in despair and hopelessness in contemplating this overwhelming reality. We know that faith communities and advocacy groups are forging a new path for those who are alert and awake to the structures we participate in both consciously and unconsciously. These structures are human-made, and they can be undone by human actions as well.

There are many signs of a paradigm shift in mindset and values, if we only shake ourselves awake from mind-numbing distractions to pay attention to them and to see God's invitation to nurture life-giving alternatives to the dominant story of the sacred market.



Mercy Sister Ana Siufi (left) at a 2014 Global Frackdown event in Argentina.

TAKE ACTION

This Advent watch for the withered leaves of unjust structures and institutions that need new life breathed into them in order to flourish for the common good. Listen to author David Korten and Loyola University professor Bill Quigley talk about the growth of corporate power and opportunities for confronting that power by changing the story that shapes our culture to one that is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching. <http://maryknollogc.org/calendar/webinar-series-building-faithful-response-corporate-power>

PRAYER

Sister Ana, in her plea to think more sustainably, invites us to pray:

God of Life, we know that the dominant economic system has to change, and we ask for the courage to respond to the Spirit calling for that change. In a world that is suffering, we seek values of love, solidarity, true freedom and compassion, to feel ourselves as a drop of water in the entire universe and to realize that everything is interconnected. Help us to be part of this compassion and love that will lead us to combat the culture that is involved in the destruction of Earth and her peoples.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

An Economy of Thriving and Resilient Communities

REFLECTION

By Elizabeth Nye, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Advent Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

"A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
Every mountain and hill shall be made low;
The rugged land shall be made a plain,
The rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all mankind shall see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

(Isaiah, 40: 1-5)

As we enter into the second week of Advent, we continue to reflect on the anticipation of God's arrival, and our baptismal call to be in right relationship with the Earth and God's people. God brings a fulfillment that no object, place, or person can fill. With this comes a fullness of life that fills the void in our hearts with the Holy Spirit. This season is one of excitement and preparation for God's appearance on Earth, but is also a chance for us to experience the renewal of our baptismal promises.

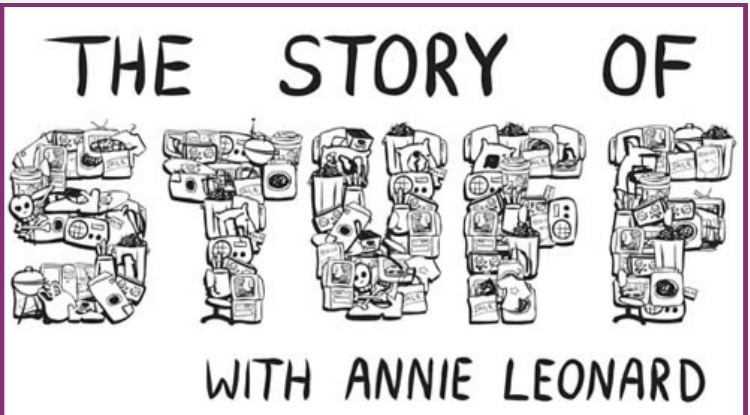
We know that we have a responsibility to others and to future generations. Currently, we are bearing witness to a society that is dominated by the constant need for more material possessions, food items that are shipped across the country at the cost of increased carbon pollution, and a demand for new gadgets, clothes, or other materials that are the newest style or model. Once we are done with them, these items are wasted or thrown away, contributing a burden of pollution for communities today and for future generations to come.

As our constant need for "stuff" increases, so do profits for corporations that exploit workers and damage the environment to keep up with market demand, produce new products, and sell them at low costs to consumers. This model is not only unsustainable, but aims to fill the void in our hearts with *things* rather than remembering our baptismal promise to fill our lives with the Holy Spirit.

TAKE ACTION

We can support local economies and contribute to vibrant and resilient communities by looking inward at our own habits of consumption and make choices that renew our relationship with creation and communities near and far.

- * Watch "The Story of Stuff" video with your family, friends, or church group. Brainstorm ways you can reduce the amount of "stuff" you purchase and use on a day-to-day basis. storyofstuff.org
- * As we reconsider our relationships with "stuff," Earth and people who are poor and vulnerable, research Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, co-ops and other sources of local food in your area. Through these structures we can support solidarity economies.
- * In addition to buying less for Christmas think of ways to support a solidarity economy through a local or international co-op, or by giving to a local development project, or gifting a CSA membership for 2015.



PRAYER

Creator God, as I reflect on my baptismal promises, give me the wisdom to consider how my actions negatively impact the Earth, people and workers throughout the supply chain, and the ones that will come after me. Give me the patience to change my habits, and work toward living in right relationship with your people and Earth. Help us to change the culture of waste and corporate greed that is responsible for the destruction of your creation.

*"I have baptized you with water;
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." -Mark, 1: 8*

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Public Policies for an Economy of Right Relationship

REFLECTION

By Chloe Schwabe, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Advent Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

This week's scriptures call us to action -- to be a voice in the wilderness, a light, and to bring the good news to the oppressed and poor in our world. There are many things we can do as individuals and faith communities to be a cool balm to the suffering of creation and the many marginalized communities globally. But there are also many solutions that involve changing structures of inequality and consumption that drive environmental destruction, displacement of communities, and abuses of workers.

In May 2014, Pope Francis urged the UN to promote development goals that attack root causes of poverty and hunger, protect the environment and ensure dignified labor for all. He said that this involves challenging all forms of injustices and resisting the economy of exclusion, the throwaway culture and the culture of death which nowadays sadly risks becoming passively accepted.

The traditional form of measuring development and progress is through Gross Domestic Product. It doesn't measure the triple bottom line- social, economic and environmental. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences noted that, "GDP does not take into account Earth's degradation nor the unjust inequalities between and within countries."

Nigeria and Colombia are generating wealth from extractive industries such as mining and oil. But the cost has been great: displacement of communities, lands and ecosystems polluted, and community leaders murdered. Meanwhile the governments have failed to re-invest the wealth generated from these industries into education, healthcare, or other programs that would improve the lives of low-income communities. When factors such as environmental destruction, lack of educational opportunities, and conflict are taken into account, progress might actually be negative.

Nations such as Brazil and Bhutan and states such as Oregon, Vermont, and Maryland are starting to employ a Genuine Progress Index that measures up to 26 different factors, including social, environmental and economic measures, that contribute to progress.

Psalm 126 opens with, "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy." Just as Isaiah was anointed to bring good news to the oppressed, we too can bring good news through empowering our policymakers to invest in the triple bottom line.

PRAYER

A Body Prayer for a New Creation (adapted for individuals or groups)

Dear Creator God, as I/we wait for the coming of your Son into our lives, I/we honor the virtue of patience.

(Raise your arms up from each side and make a circle at the top.) I/We wait for the sun to rise over the earth welcoming a new day for all creation. In this season of darkness, I/we know the light will come to warm our hearts. I/We know the challenges that face your creation from climate change to resource depletion but I/we live in hope that your light will come.

(Move your fingers like the rain as you lower your arms straight down like rain until you touch your toes) I/We also wait for the rain to fall from the heavens to water the seeds of justice. I/We pray for a day when no one will go hungry and that I/we am/are supported by local food systems that nourish all creation. I/We pray for the end of violence related to land grabs and extractive industries. I/We pray that corporations play a tempered role in society - one that allows for local economies to flourish.

(Roll up one vertebrae at a time into standing position with your eyes closed. If in a group, reader reads the following once everyone has stood up)

May I/we restore the fortunes of Zion (Psalm 126) and once again have clean water, healthy ecosystems and right relationships with all humankind and the Earth. May my/our voice(s) in the wilderness become a light to the world (John 1:7) and a chorus of joy (Psalm 126) as we build a new economy for a new creation. **Amen**

ACTION

Write a letter to your representatives in the U.S. Congress and the State House to invest more of the budget in human needs and environmental protection. Send the letter found at: www.maryknollogc.org/alerts/advent.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Diminishing Corporate Power

Reflection

By Susan Thompson, Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice Office

Advent Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Luke 1:26-38

"The angel answered, 'And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too, your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.'"

(Luke 1:36-37)

As impossible as the situation might have seemed for two cousins, one barren and the other a virgin, each to be carrying a child, this is what faith communities are called to today, to imagine the impossible as possible, and as Mary and Elizabeth gave support and strength to each other so too are we called to give each other support and encouragement in imagining and birthing a new economy of justice and peace.

The impossible is possible. We rarely see it in life but when we do we remember it. The tearing down of the Berlin wall is one example of the unthinkable happening. While it did not happen in a day – as it seemed at the time – it overtook the minds and imaginations of the people of the world. Behind the event were many years of work by groups, individuals and communities who came together and worked hard, some even losing their lives. And so with this in mind, the Berlin wall of corporate power can also be brought down. As communities around the world bring attention to the injustice of corporate power and the devastation being caused to economies, nations, communities, families and God's creation, the wall of ignorance and greed can give way to understanding and change.

As corporations have become more powerful than some nations, what seems impossible must become possible. Human laws that have given corporations unlimited power can be challenged. Corporate leaders must be held accountable for the harm that is done in the name of economic growth. In addition to challenging corporate power and greed we must challenge our own need for more – for this greed enables corporations to plunder the earth and its resources, disrupt communities and endanger the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.



ACTION

Below are three possible actions for this week. Do what makes most sense for you, your family, or your community.

- Check out a series of articles on the history and role of corporations in the U.S. available on the website of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. <http://maryknollogc.org/article/corporations-us-special-series>
- Leading up to the fifth anniversary of Citizens United, attend or organize a showing of the film, *Pay to Play*, on the growing influence of money in politics. Find information at: <http://www.moneyout-votersin.org/>
- Consider joining a local chapter of Move to Amend. It works for a Constitutional Amendment to end corporate personhood.

"I am the handmaid of the Lord" - Luke 1:38

PRAYER

O God, we recognize our own complicity in the greed of corporations as we too can be greedy and feel entitled to more than our share of the Earth's resources. Forgive us and give us the wisdom and strength to continue to envision the impossible and to help diminish the power corporations have over the world. Help us to be part of the compassion and love that will lead us to combat the culture that is involved in the destruction of Earth and her peoples.

ENDNOTES

¹World Food Program. <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/who-are>. Accessed 10/29/14.

²Water.org. <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/>. Accessed 10/29/14.

³United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c146.html>. Accessed 10/23/14.

⁴Faith Ecology Economy Transformation Working Group. <http://faitheconomyecology.wordpress.com/2010/07/26/130/>.

⁵Sisters of Mercy. <http://www.sistersofmercy.org/espanol/recursos/hermana-en-argentina-habla-sobre-peligros-de-un-sistema-economico-impulsado-por-el-lucro/>.

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Learn more about the Faith Economy Ecology Transformation Working Group at:

<http://faitheconomyecology.wordpress.com>