

Principle Blossoms into Program

By Christine Loughlin, OP

On a cold, dark night in January headlights began to appear at the foot of our driveway as cars drove up and parked one after another around the circle. They had come to meet the new farmer, John Mitchell of Heirloom Harvest Community Farm. We were surprised at the number of people who came as two growing seasons had passed since Crystal Spring Community Garden surrendered to circumstances. We lacked the acreage necessary to sustain our own farmer. In those two years members' commitment had not waned. They remained faithful to locally grown organic, preserving and protecting local farm land by supporting a farmer, building community that enhances a local food system.

Humans evolve through the creating of culture, and story is what sustains a culture. On that winter evening the story was about carrots and cauliflower, regional and heirloom vegetables, and six acres of leased land. The farm is located in Westboro just off I-495. That interstate is an arc of highway that demonstrates New England's cultural decline and restructuring in the past fifty years. The paved eight-lane road testifies to the demise of thousands of acres of farmland and the construction of present day high-tech industrial parks surrounded by housing developments with easy access to the highway where folks travel to and from 'jobs'.

The high speed highway demonstrates the rapidity of the cultural changes over the past fifty years. In 1945 the nations of the world recognized the degradation of the human spirit after the mass killings in a second world war. Representatives from fifty countries met to draw up the United Nations Charter. The Charter became the foundational agreement among the nations united in harmonizing their actions for the good of all people. A significant concept had arisen. Our concerns for each other extend beyond national boundaries. Fifty years after the birth of the UN, we awaken to the realization that not only the human family but the community of all life has arrived at a point that pales the destruction experienced after the War. The living systems of the Planet have become the non-renewable material for a global market economy that consumes natural resources and manufactures waste.

The degradation of the Planet impelled a response. Peoples around the globe have come to a renewed love for their home place, a love that erupted in the face of critical diminishment. It is *we the people* that acknowledged a need for a Charter for the environment to complement the UN Charter.

A global movement began. By 1988 a million people had signed an Earth Covenant. The covenant is a citizens' treaty for common ecological security. We recognize Earth is our home and we share it with all living beings. The covenant was not a petition to governments but an examination of our own lives—in relationship with each other and in relationship with an economics that assures ecological security. By 1992 several million had signed the covenant declaring our partnership with each other and with Earth. To this partnership we gave our word of honor.

We had entered Earth story as eco-systems creatures. We awakened to self-reflective consciousness amidst beauty and abundance. Our security was our interdependence with the 'local environment.' We've emerged as eco-systems "shapers or misshapers". The Covenant confirmed we are recovering from our alienation and realizing our one shared future.

By 1992 the Covenant had grown into Charter status. Though the Earth Charter was never commended at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, it has become the recognized document for dialogue between peoples and between citizens and their government. The

Charter pronounces the fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society.

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A mounted copy hangs on the wall in our resource room. But it is the story of the carrots and cauliflower and recipes for locally grown food that incarnates it here. When the share-holders drive up the driveway in the heat of New England summer, we will know that we are keeping our word of honor. Principle 5 reads: *Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural process that sustain life.* Praise be to farmers!

On the cross quarter day between the Solstice and the coming Equinox we celebrated in song Earth's dream as *we the people* sense that dream emerging.

*Reverence for the mystery of being,
gratitude for the gift of life,
a humility for our human place
in nature and the whole*

(EC, music by Carolyn McDade)

One's work in life is always determined by the Moment, by what the Times require. At a time of diminishment of religious congregations on the North American continent, we acknowledge our historical connection to the land. Forty percent of growers in Massachusetts are first generation farmers. We work to connect the land held by congregations with the coming generation who are inspired to give their lives to healing soils through tending beets, tomatoes, and greens.

At the Equinox festival, shareholder families and friends will discover their own way to befriend the land and soils. Everyone will construct a simple container to set up and maintain a worm composting system in her own kitchen! Eating is taking something from the soil; something must always be returned.

With our programs in the arts and our retreats that draw us deeper into Earth's story, we participate with the many who sense a new and fundamental change is underway. Change happens in the mind and heart and is manifest in the work of human hands. We learn our way by living into it.

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