

WEBCAST

What is Land Justice Futures? It began with a group called Nuns and Nones. It now is a group of young, committed adults joined with committed congregations of Catholic Sisters (the Nuns and Nones) in order to explore how land could restore broken relationships and repair historical wrongs.

We have joined the 2nd cohort of Land Justice Futures with 8 other Congregations. We call ourselves the Prairie Cohort. Our team consists of Jane Belanger, Susan Leslie, Claire, McGowan, Associate Julie Laudick Doherty, and me.

Something like what Claire shared in June, I'd like to share a bit of my own story with the Land. I was raised in Western Kansas where there is lots of land and sky space. And I am a farmer's daughter. I grew up thinking that land was the most valuable thing to be clung to and worked for beyond any other thing. I treasured land and it was part of my identity. When my sister divorced, her ex-husband could have anything, but he could not touch the land.

When I became a Dominican Sister, I deepened an almost mystical connection with land and the natural world as a bridge to the Divine. When Pope Francis wrote Laudato Si, I continued to contemplate our connection and oneness with the whole Earth Community. At the time of LS publication, I was serving in leadership and became more aware that we did not truly OWN land but were entrusted with the care of certain lands. These lands were no longer a THING to be used for profit, but a treasure, a blessing, to support the common good. Care of the land became, yes, a duty, but also a privilege, a holy work.

Then in 2022, we celebrated the 200th anniversary of our foundation in KY, and studied deeply and prayed more intentionally our beginnings. The cultural and spiritual losses suffered by the Indigenous Peoples and formerly enslaved peoples were more deeply felt. With shame we had to acknowledge that our Kentucky beginnings were built with the labor of slaves. With more shame, we now confess the sin of our Church, which in the 15th century promulgated the Papal Bulls which became known as the Doctrine of Discovery. This gave privilege to Europeans (Whites) to “claim (steal) any land discovered” in the New World, and it even justified genocide and enslavement to build a robust economy.

About the lands we hold today:

Currently, our congregation is entrusted with four ecology centers: 2 in Ohio, one in Kentucky, and one in Kansas, among other land holdings. In the future we may decide to divest of some of these properties. Our question is, “How might we make that decision of divestment to further peace and reconciliation?” Our Gospel values dictate that we go beyond a mere business mindset. This thinking was part of the motivation to begin collaboration with Land Justice Futures.

The Doctrine of Discovery continues to impact United States real estate law and public policy until the present day. In 1823 the U.S. Supreme Court case of Johnson v. M’Intosh, Chief Justice John Marshall used the Doctrine of Discovery to assert that the United States, as the successor of Great Britain, had inherited authority over all lands within our claimed boundaries. This decision allowed our government to legally ignore or invalidate any

Native American claims to property. To this day courts continue to cite this legal precedent. It is still being used by courts to decide property rights cases brought by Native Americans against the U.S. and against non-Natives.

Last year, the Vatican repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. But 500 years of practice and human rights abuses do not disappear easily! We carry the legacy of bias that Euro-Americans (Whites) are superior.

Currently 98% of land in the US is owned by Whites. Land is generally thought of as a commodity, a THING, giving the owner the right to extract, destroy, or use up the natural resources. Land under White ownership has been destroyed with a significant loss of topsoil and a loss of 95% of old growth forests. Our question is how better to be in relationship with Land as a subject, not as a THING, in order to ensure land's viability and availability for future generations. How might we open access to land for Indigenous peoples and People of Color?

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* speaks that we are not in an era of change, but we are in a change of era. Nature teaches us that there is no one way to heal the damage to Earth, but our responsibility is to pay attention and engage in partnerships so that together we may creatively prepare a more just future. We believe that Land holds a key to Earth's healing since it is Land which holds our stories (history). We look forward to continuing to work with Land Justice Futures and the other Religious Congregations as we live into these questions about use and/or transition of our land.

On Saturday, November 23, we have scheduled a ZOOM workshop day from 9-4 Eastern time. This is for Sisters and Associates to deepen our understanding of land and her story. Mark your calendar!

You will receive a link to a video (about an hour in length) over the next three months. The first one for August will be sent out tomorrow in the enews. Look for the next two in September and October. These videos come with some reflection questions to prepare for our time together on Nov. 23. You may want to view the video in a group and discuss the questions. We highly recommend that you make the time for this study whether alone or with others in order to deepen our discussion in November.

Again, look for the link in Tomorrow's enews called, "Intro to Land Justice". Sarah Bradley is the main presenter. I hope you enjoy it and the videos to follow.