Voices of Sisters

Environment



Author Rosemarie Greco and Litchfield Land Trust members walk the land in Litchfield, Connecticut, to consider easement boundaries. (Jo-Ann Iannotti)



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"Our Common Home": With these three words Pope Francis introduced a new mindset through his encyclical, "*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*." In a very real sense, the land in Litchfield, Connecticut, which was home to the novitiate of the Daughters of Wisdom, has evolved into a common home shared by many, by means of a land conservation easement.

Our conservation easement is a way to protect 54 acres of land from development and thereby, protect its natural soil, ecosystem, streams, native wildlife and birds that depend on this land. This is a change from earlier ideas of how to relate to our land. We no longer want to have "dominion" over the land but rather, we want to "care for" it.

Through this conservation easement, the Daughters of Wisdom will continue to "own" the land. This was a concern for many of the sisters in our congregation. The land is protected in perpetuity and — should there be a future buyer — the conservation easement remains. The only negative side to this agreement would be the loss of a possible sale of the land to a land developer who wanted to remove the trees or otherwise harm the natural environment.

This easement confirms that the land owned by the international congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom is also "Our Common Home." The land is protected and under our care through the ministry at Wisdom House Retreat and Conference Center. A land conservation easement signing on Feb. 10 sealed this agreement between the Daughters of Wisdom and the Litchfield Land Trust. This land trust, one of several in the United States, is certified to protect and monitor the land to assure that no illegal activities are taking place on it — such as the disposal of hazardous waste or unauthorized logging.

Sr. Catherine Sheehan, leader of the U.S. Province, commented at the ceremony: "As Daughters of Wisdom celebrating being in Litchfield, Connecticut, for the past 70 years, we consider this land conservation easement a part of a lasting legacy. Wisdom House reflects by its mission a reverence and care for nature. We see this as an opportunity to preserve this beautiful land in its natural state for generations to come."

When our sisters heard that the international congregational leadership had approved the conservation easement, there was great joy! For over two years, we

had been learning about easements; our chapter statements included care of the Earth. Now, another step was being taken.

We understood some of the Wisdom books of the Bible in a new way: Proverbs 3:18 (tree of life), and Wisdom 7:17-22 (nature of the universe and all creatures) were given new life for us. And we were increasingly aware of the love of creation that our founder St. Louis de Montfort expressed in his hymn and poems. In Hymn 155 he sings, "In this woodland, in these peaceful retreats, in the shadow of these forests, what benefits we find, what silence and yet what language." In his chapter "Creation" in the book *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis de Montfort*, Montfort Fr. Bernard Guitteny said that de Montfort had a profound personal reverence for God's created nature in all its mineral, vegetative, animal and human forms.

The mission of our Daughters of Wisdom congregation is to seek and contemplate divine wisdom present in a world that hungers for meaning, justice and compassion, so we are challenged to focus our vision on all reality — since the Incarnation reveals God in everything in the world and cosmos. Our Rule of Life tells us that even the practice of poverty demands that we protect the planet and bring about an equitable distribution of the goods of the Earth.



Attorney Peter Ebersol presides over the signing of the conservation agreement by Litchfield Land Trust President David Geiger and Srs. Catherine Sheehan and Evelyn Eckhardt. (Jo-Ann Iannotti)

Grounded in the convictions of our faith, our ecological conversion makes our values evident in our relationships with the world around us. Most congregations of women religious have since their founding practiced the three R's — reduce, recycle, reuse — under the mantle of "living simply." Now, we see that they are needed on a larger scale. In 2011, Wisdom House installed 80 solar panels on its barn; our research at the time indicated that it was the first retreat center in Connecticut to do so. Since then, many churches and individual retreatants realized that such sustainable actions were possible in their own areas.

What we do to the environment directly affects those who are poor, in ill health, or in economic strife. We must act as stewards of "Our Common Home," of Wisdom's house (Proverbs 9:1). On an Earth groaning from wounds we have inflicted, it's a call to action.

Personally, I have walked these forests and fields since my novitiate days. I know that this land, its wildlife and varied ecosystems have shaped my life, my spirituality, my perspective and my values. By conserving this land, future generations can breathe clean air, experience life in its varied forms, and through this, thrive.

I know this land as our common home for people of all spiritual paths and all cultures. Guests are welcomed to Wisdom House and are provided with a home for a period of time. The land and accommodations are hospitable, healthy and sustainable in terms of the land they will be walking, the food they will be enjoying and the retreats that will be inspiring them.

Here, guests are brought home to themselves and can grow in consciousness about their integral connection to the earth and cosmos. And this home will witness to the values of *Laudato Si':* respect for creation, and an ecological spirituality that is both ancient and contemporary.

Several mentors and collaborators brought us to the day of formally signing the easement document. We are grateful to those who helped us: the Litchfield Land Trust, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Dominican Sisters of Hope, Religious Land Conservation Project, Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey, Daughters of Wisdom U.S., Daughters of Wisdom International, and Wisdom House.

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Through these people and places, our thinking was broadened to see the environment as vitally connected to the well-being of all peoples. From the Dominican Sisters of Hope and the Religious Land Conservation Project, I learned the processes of creating a conservation easement. From presenters of seminars and conferences — sharing insights of Ewert Cousins, Thomas Berry, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin — we were invited to ponder ideas related to the land in our stewardship. They also pointed to the treasure in the wisdom spirituality that we share.

We look forward to all who will be "welcomed home" when they arrive at Wisdom House in the future.

The Daughters of Wisdom invested care in this land for them.

[Rosemarie Greco is a member of the congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. After directing the Wisdom House Retreat and Conference Center in Litchfield,

Connecticut, for 27 years, she is volunteering as a hospital chaplain and board member for Litchfield Housing Trust.]

This story appears in the **Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action** feature series. View the full series.