



CONCEPT PAPER

SSGN'S YOUTH PROJECT "EcoSpirit & EarthCare with Emerging Young Global Eco-Leaders"

SPIRITUALITY & SUSTAINABILITY GLOBAL NETWORK

<https://spirituality-sustainability.net>

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THE NEW & GREAT WORLD-HISTORICAL THREAT

FOR SOME, THE FUTURE MAY SEEM HOPELESS, due to political and economic leaders' global failure to respond adequately to what we call catastrophic and still-expanding "Global Ecological Devastation." In addition, the Global New Right, often funded by what many call a new "Global Oligarchy" of billionaires, is aggressively driving the human global political economy toward what science writer Elizabeth Kolbert has defined as the "sixth extinction" of life across our home planet Earth.

However, despite the failure of global economic and political leaders, and despite the dangerous rise of the Global New Right, we see emerging two powerful sources of prophetic challenge that are boldly responding to the great world-historical threat of Global Ecological Devastation.

- a. **EcoSpirit & EarthCare.** The first powerful source of prophetic energy is Ecological Spirituality ("EcoSpirit" for short) and its practical expression in Ecological Ethics ("EarthCare" for short).¹ This energy is now arising from leaders of all the world's religions. Two leading examples are the late Pope Francis' powerful encyclical letter *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*, and the equally powerful Islamic document *Al Mizan – A Covenant for the Earth*.²
- b. **Emerging Young Global Eco-Leaders.** The second untapped source is the emerging generations of what our SSGN Board of Directors' members, Amanda Bennett-Rivera and Sam King, have called "*Emerging Earth leaders*." We call them "*Emerging Young Global Eco-Leaders*."

This new SSGN Youth Project will draw on both those emerging sources. It will design and implement an Eco-Spirit & EarthCare program for high school students to form them in Ecological Spirituality and Ecological Ethics, and to guide them in prophetic actions to protect the threatened Biosphere of our loving Creator's beloved garden-planet Earth.

¹ For more information on Ecological Spirituality and Ecological Ethics challenging the global "New Right" wave of anti-ecological authoritarianism, see the recent article in the *Journal of EcoSpirit & EarthCare* titled "Global Ecological Devastation" (Winter 2025 Issue) by Joe Holland. See also his book *Postmodern Ecological Spirituality* (Pacem in Terris Press, 2017).

² See https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html and <https://www.almizan.earth>.

ECOSPIRIT & EARTHCARE

“EcoSpirit-EarthCare” is the new core theme for our Spirituality & Sustainability Global Network (SSGN). Following a long series of Conferences on Spirituality & Sustainability held between 1990 and 2018 in Italy’s spiritual city of Assisi (home of St. Francis) and at the Vatican, we launched our new organization of SSGN and set it up in 2019 as a non-profit body incorporated within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Now, our main goal is to recruit and mentor new generations of emerging young global eco-leaders in EcoSpirit & EarthCare, and to do so in light of SSGN’s four foundational pillars.

SSGN’s FOUR FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

- a. **Indigenous Traditions.** First, while seeking inspiration from all eco-ethical and eco-spiritual wisdom traditions across our human family, we especially seek to learn from Indigenous Traditions. We seek to learn from their celebration of the Creator’s deeply spiritual gifts of our sacred Cosmos, our sacred garden-planet Earth, and all of Earth’s sacred and beautiful creatures.
- b. **Thomas Berry’s mystical-cosmic vision.** Second, we draw on the writings of the late Catholic priest and eco-visionary, Thomas Berry. He was inspired in part by the visionary French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We especially promote Thomas’ book, written late in his life, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. This book analyzes root causes of the current ecological breakdown of Modern Industrial Civilization. It also summons us to create a new “Ecozoic Era” to save the Biosphere of our garden-planet Earth. We hope to mentor emerging young global eco-leaders in Thomas’ mystical cosmovision of life’s sacred and creative communion.
- c. **The Earth Charter.** Third, we draw on this visionary global document with its own four pillars: 1) Respect and Care for the Community of Life, 2) Ecological Integrity, 3) Social and Economic Justice, and 4) Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace. People across the world created the Earth Charter as a foundational vision for global governance. It provides ecological and social values and principles to guide global governance for a sustainable, just, peaceful, and democratic future. We hope to mentor emerging young global eco-leaders in the Earth Charter’s four pillars and related principles.
- d. **Laudato Si’ – On Care for our Common Home.** Fourth, we draw on Pope Francis’ 2015 prophetic eco-spiritual letter on integral ecology. It indicates that we are now entering what Pope Paul VI in 1970 warned could become an “ecological catastrophe under the effective explosion of Industrial Civilization.” We seek to mentor emerging young global eco-leaders in Laudato Si’s prophetic vision of Ecological Spirituality and Ecological Ethics.

FUNDRAISING DRIVE

For a Part-Time Director & Expenses for this SSGN Youth Project Across the New York City Metro Region & Beyond

We are launching this SSGN Youth Project Fundraising Drive to raise at least \$15,000 to support Mr. Joe Muller, a Catholic secondary-school Theology teacher and a visionary and experienced eco-justice organizer, as a part-time SSGN Youth Project Director to work within the New York City Metro Region. We hope to pay Joe a

stipend of \$1,000.00 per month for an initial 12 months (\$12,000 for 1 year) and allocate \$3,000 for project expenses.

- a. **Pilot Project.** This pilot project will begin work with young female secondary school students at Mary Louis Academy, sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood and located in New York City's Jamaica section of the Borough of Queens. We will also work in cooperation with Thomas Berry Place (a Passionist retreat center near the school in Jamaica), and in cooperation with the eco-vision of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, whose headquarters are close by in Long Island.
- b. **Regional Expansion.** At the same time, the project will support development of a network of "Ecology Clubs" in other Catholic high schools across the New York City Greater Metro region – something Joe Muller has been working on for several years. In particular, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood have three more schools in the region, plus one in Puerto Rico. (The Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood also have a rich history of EcoSpirit & EarthCare!) In addition, there could be wider outreach across the region – into Long Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and even Puerto Rico – through the network of Ecology Clubs that Joe Muller has long been developing.
- c. **Study Manuals.** The project will eventually develop study manuals, perhaps in English and Spanish versions, and based on SSGN's four pillars and other resourceful materials. We will invite SSGN members who have already worked in these areas to help with developing these materials.
- d. **Project Advisers.** We will invite Sam King, Amanda Bennett-Rivera, and César Baldelomar, all young and experienced SSGN eco-leaders, to serve as the SSGN Advisory Committee for this Youth Project. Finally, the project will develop what we will call a broader "Emerging Young Eco-Leaders Advisory Council," by inviting established young religious eco-leaders from across the globe also to become project advisers.

