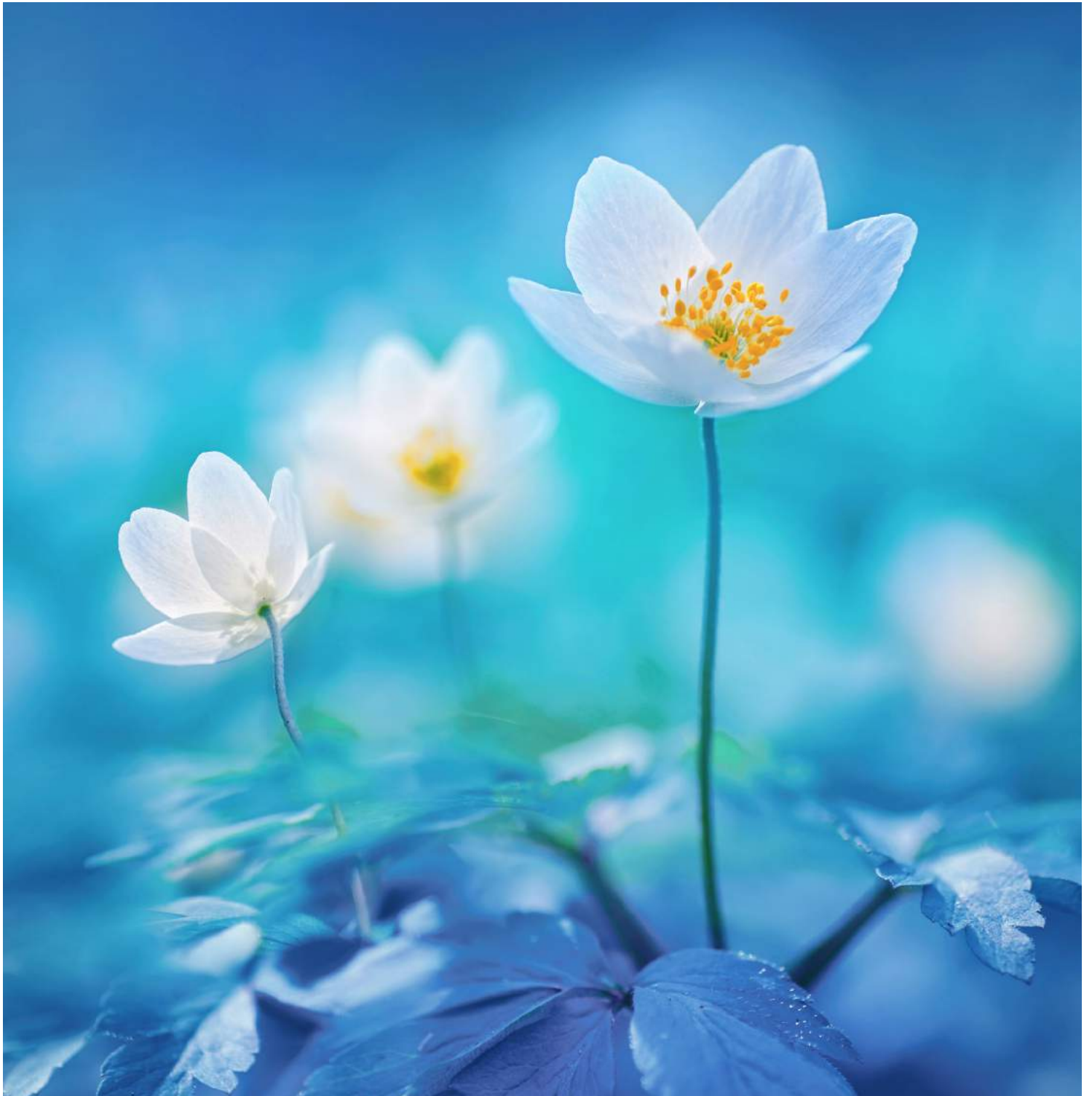


STILL POINT

A PUBLICATION OF TAU CENTER

A spirituality ministry of the Wheaton Franciscans



EARTH GRATITUDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 1. LOVE AND GRATITUDE FOR THE EARTH | 3 |
| 2. GUIDELINES FOR THE GREAT TURNING | 4 |
| 3. ST. CLARE OF ASSISI | 6 |
| 4. EARTH GRATITUDE | 8 |
| 5. PRACTICES TO HELP YOU CONNECT | 10 |
| 6. GRATITUDE TO NATURE | 14 |
| 7. RETURN TO THE WORLD | 18 |
| 8. LIVING THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT | 20 |
| 9. PRAYERS FOR PLANET EARTH | 22 |

Image Credits/Art Sources by:
iStock & Shutterstock

EDITOR: SHARON DEVO
CONTENT: JEANNE CONNOLLY, SR GLENNA CZACHOR, OSF
SHARON DEVO, SR BEA HERNANDEZ, OSF
SHARON NIEMET, CAROL SIMLER
DESIGN & LAYOUT BY CHRISTINE CIANCIOSI

© 2023
ALL RIGHT RESERVED TAU CENTER

A DAILY PRACTICE OF LOVE AND GRATITUDE FOR THE EARTH

Gratitude: Where Healing the Earth Begins

We have received an inestimable gift. To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe—to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it—is a wonder beyond words. It is an extraordinary privilege to be accorded a human life, with self-reflexive consciousness that brings awareness of our own actions and the ability to make choices. It lets us choose to take part in the healing of our world.

Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic, the source of all true art. Yet we so easily take this gift for granted. That is why so many spiritual traditions begin with thanksgiving, to remind us that for all our woes and worries, our existence itself is an unearned benefaction, which we could never of ourselves create.

*Gratitude for this beautiful, self-organizing universe
where we live is the foundation
of environmental responsibility.*

— Joanna Macy

GUIDELINES FOR THE GREAT TURNING

Come from Gratitude

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe – to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it – is a wonder beyond words. Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic, the source of all true art. Furthermore, it is a privilege to be alive in this time when we can choose to take part in the self-healing of our world.

Don't be Afraid of the Dark

This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of our world. So don't be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, for these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnectedness with all beings. To suffer with is the literal meaning of compassion.

Dare to Vision

Out of this darkness a new world can arise, not to be constructed by our minds so much as to emerge from our dreams. Even though we cannot see clearly how it's going to turn out, we are still called to let the future into our imagination. We will never be able to build what we have not first cherished in our hearts.

GRATITUDE

Roll up your Sleeves

Many people don't get involved in the Great Turning because there are so many different issues, which seem to compete with each other. Shall I save the whales or help battered children? The truth is that all aspects of the current crisis reflect the same mistake, setting ourselves apart and using others for our gain. So to heal one aspect helps the others to heal as well. Just find what you love to work on and take joy in that. Never try to do it alone. Link up with others; you'll spark each others' ideas and sustain each others' energy.

Act your Age

Since every particle in your body goes back to the first flaring forth of space and time, you really are as old as the universe. So when you are lobbying at your congressperson's office, or visiting your local utility, or testifying at a hearing on nuclear waste, or standing up to protect an old grove of redwoods, you are doing that not out of some personal whim, but in the full authority of your 15 billion years.

by Joanna Macy



ST. CLARE OF ASSISI: The Little Plant of St. Francis

by Sr Glenna Czachor, OSF

St. Clare often described herself as the **"little plant of the most blessed father Francis"**. Francis planted in her a zeal for the Gospel and helped her cultivate a new way of living by following the example of Jesus.

Anyone who has been lucky enough to visit the chapel and monastery of San Damiano in Assisi, Italy will have been immersed in the same natural beauty that St. Clare and her sisters inhabited for the 42 years. This place which St. Clare called **"the garden of the Lord"** and her religious community, **"a vineyard of poverty."**

This small, yet beautiful place is surrounded by flower and herb gardens, olive groves and rows of stately pine trees. From the windows of the upper dormitory, Clare's gaze would have befallen these same

gardens and the groves of olive trees, and valleys of the Umbrian region, dotted with fields of grain and sunflowers.

Clare herself cultivated a vegetable garden and was known for her use of healing herbs. She may have been inspired by her own mother, Ortolana, whose name I learned recently means "good gardener."



Courtyard at San Damiano



View of the Umbrian Valley from San Damiano

When Clare gazes on creation, it is not a gaze from on high, but rather the gaze of a 'sister' of one equal and related to all of Creation. She gazes with esteem, kindness and solidarity. She invites her sisters to **gaze upon** all that lives around them, seeing that they are in a vital relationship with the trees, with human beings and with all other creatures. She teaches us that this relationship is a mutual giving and receiving, and provides for the necessities of life. All participate together in the gift of life, allowing each creature to be authentic, to be seen and to be accepted in its uniqueness.

This mutuality is reflected in the familiar **Canticle of Creation** composed by St. Francis. In 1225 while recuperating from

illness, Francis stayed in a small hut in the garden of San Damiano and wrote this beautiful expression of his love of God and nature and the relationship we share with all of creation.

It is quite fitting then, that The Wheaton Franciscans should chose to honor our patron St. Clare our patron in this garden on our campus. As we walk these garden paths and contemplate the flowers and trees, and all the elements of nature, let us find inspiration from St. Clare to marvel at the beautiful creations of God, and consider the impact of her life upon the world, this **"little plant"** of the **"little poor man"** of Assisi.

(photos by Bill Humecke,
used with permission)

EARTH GRATITUDE: God's Vision of Abundant Life

Earth Day 2023 Prayer Service

OPENING SONG – GOD BEYOND ALL NAME

By: Bernadette Mary Farrell

OPENING PRAYER – VISION OF WHOLENESS

God of grace,
creator of a world of plenty,
the heavens declare your glory
and the earth, your generosity.
In love, you created us,
and in your likeness,
you made us partners in creation.
In greed and power, we have turned away
and have marred your image in us
to fashion a fragmented world.

Renew in us your vision of wholeness,
that the rich may restore wealth to the poor
and the poor share blessings with the rich.
Revive in us a passion for justice,
that the tyranny of profit be quelled,
and whispers of freedom find voice.
Refresh in us our sense of calling,
that we may follow Christ in serving others
and live simply with those who simply live.

Amen.

*Adapted from [Annabel Shilson-Thomas/CAFOD](https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/earth-day)
- Catholic Climate Covenant Earth Day 2023:
[https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/
earth-day](https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/earth-day)*

READING – ADAPTED FROM LAUDATO SI' (87, 222, 223)

When we see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise God for all creatures and to worship God in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures.

It is a return to simplicity that allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities that life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.

In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up always being on the lookout for what they do not have. They experience



what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. They can shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all, when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, service, developing their gifts, music and art, contact with nature, and prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs that only diminish us and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.

CONTEMPLATIVE PAUSE

What are you most grateful for as you reflect on God's Vision of Abundant Living?

How do you feel called to live God's Vision of Abundant Living?

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God,
As we hear the songs of birds of spring,
we yearn to sing your praises.
As we breathe the delicious scents of summer flowers,
our souls rest in your love.
As we feast our eyes on autumn reds and yellows,
we sense your creative power.
As we marvel at the uniqueness of each winter flake,
we rejoice that you know us each by name.

Living God,
As we meet you in nature,
inspire us to see anew our place in the web of life.
In our daily lives,
help us to make daily choices that reflect global solidarity.
As we reflect on the life of St. Clare of Assisi,
inspire us to advocate for laws and policies that foster a flourishing future for all creation.

Trusting in you, we pray,
Amen.

*Adapted from Catholic Climate Covenant –
Earth Day 2023 Program*

**CLOSING SONG –
SING OUT EARTH AND SKIES**
By: Marty Haugen

PRACTICES TO HELP YOU CONNECT WITH NATURE

Celebrate Earth Day by tuning in to the rhythms of the earth

Mindfulness connects us immediately with the natural world, and allows us to simply appreciate its beauty. The beauty of nature inspires awe, which we know from the research boosts happiness, generosity, even compassion and connection. It also connects us with the natural rhythms of the world, allowing us to step out of clock time and into what I think of as earth time.

The power of nature to bring us immediately to the present must be primally wired into us.

The power of nature to bring us immediately to the present must be primally wired into us. In workshops I often ask people to share what mindfulness was to them before they ever heard that word, and the answers

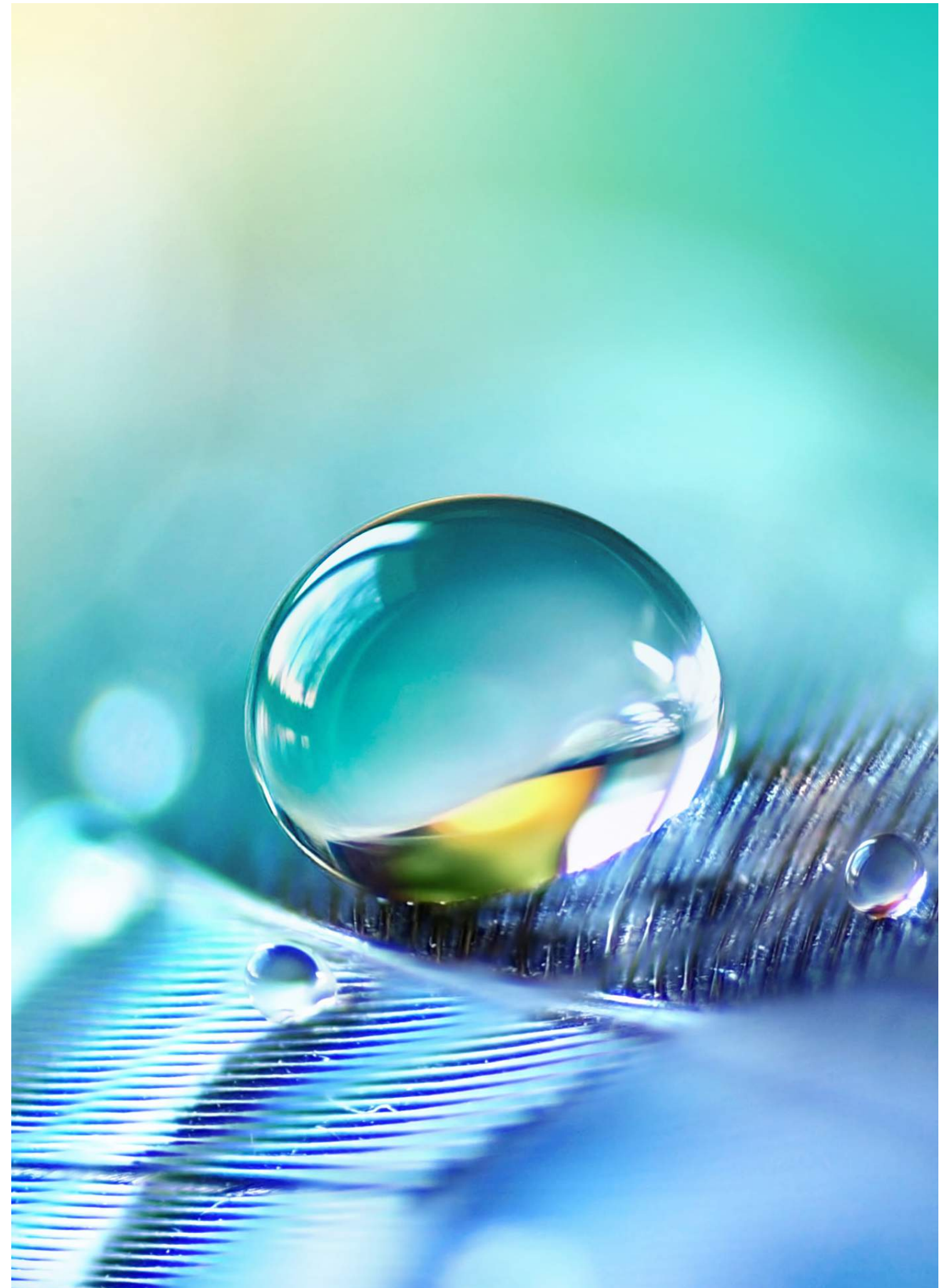
are astonishingly consistent. “Watching for shooting stars on a summer night,” “listening to the rain fall on a tent on a camping trip,” “gazing at the embers of a campfire,” “digging in my grandmother’s garden” and other sensory, nature-based experiences come up again and again.

So on Earth Day, honor nature by spending some time away from technology and in the majesty of what this earth offers. Look to nature for inspiration, see how you can connect with the natural world.

Two Mindfulness Practices to Help You Tune Into Nature on Earth Day—Or Any Day

Practice 1: Walk and Notice

Take a walk and notice the beauty that you see, a gratitude and appreciation practice that can elevate your mood.





Take the time to really *look at your favorite tree*, explore a park, and notice something new, a practice that will spark creativity.

Gaze at the shapes that nature has created, as well as spaces between them, reflecting on what the Japanese call “ma,” the “negative space” between forms that is just as important as the objects themselves.

And as you walk, notice what has changed and is changing as you pass the same spot. And don’t just walk, take some time to sit in nature. And as you sit, consider stepping out of clock time and connecting with nature’s time and rhythms.

Practice 2: Sit and Notice

- Open your window, feel the fresh air, sit and listen to the sounds of nature.
- Sit until the fog burns off...

- Sit until the sun completely sets...
- Sit until the rain ends... or begins....
- Watch an animal, even an insect at work or play until it departs...
- Sit until the puddle dries in the sun...
- Sit and watch a shadow until it has crossed your path...
- Sit until the birds finish their song...

If you can, sit beneath a tree until it lets go of a leaf and you see (or even hear) it fall to the ground.

If you can, sit at a lake and watch the surface until the wind shifts or stops...

Or simply sit until that cloud completely changes shape, and disappears or passes on the horizon....

— [*Christopher Willard*](#)

BE STILL

GRATITUDE TO NATURE

Cultivating a spirit of gratitude in our daily lives

Gratitude is Light – with these words, Masahisa Goi reminds us of the importance and value of expressing gratitude in our day-to-day life. The spirit of appreciation expressed in the words thank you sends out a harmonizing energy that affects not only the object of our gratitude, but ourselves as well.

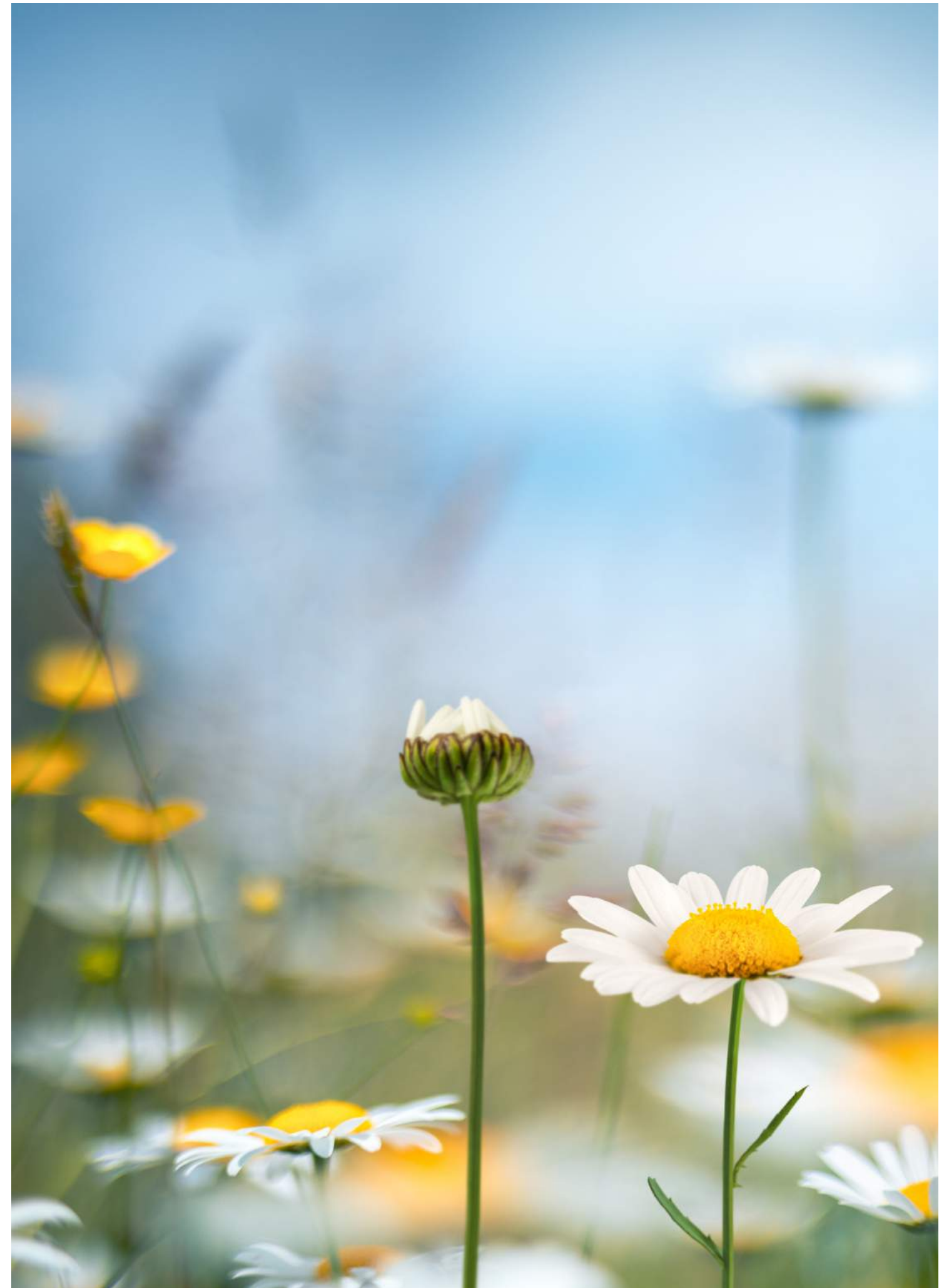
There has perhaps never been a time when the spirit of gratitude needs to be cultivated more than it does today. In *The Earth Healer's Handbook*, Masami Saionji writes:

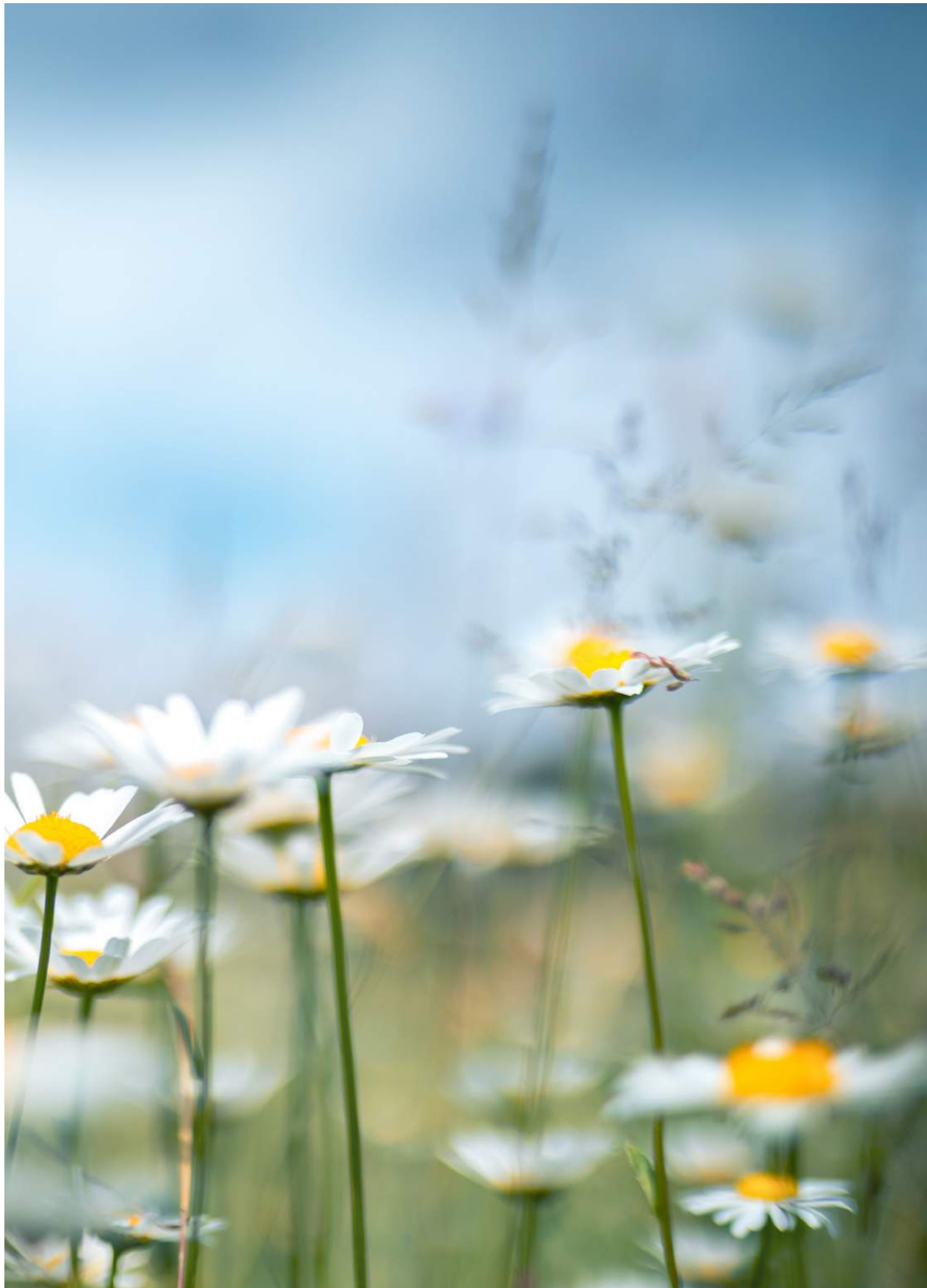
If the earth is to come alive in the 21st century, humanity must undergo a great shift in consciousness. Each of us

needs to become aware of the profound relationship that exists between our thoughts and the health and stability of the earth. To revive our ailing planet, each of us needs to infuse the earth with the healing energy of our deep gratitude for all the earth's blessings.

Words of gratitude, thoughts of gratitude, actions of gratitude toward our beloved earth-as we rekindle this spirit of gratitude our way of life will naturally change and the earth will find the power to heal itself... As we deepen our sense of oneness with all life on earth, may we each come to know what it truly means to love, cherish, and make the most of our own lives as well.

LIGHT





How can we send love and gratitude to the earth and all life?

Like a garden, gratitude requires nurturing and cultivation. Masami Saionji tells us: *We need to create new habits and new ways of thinking, until the resonance of love and gratitude comes streaming out from our whole being.*

All of us have many, many things to be thankful for, beginning with the infinite gifts from nature — the sun that warms us, the food that the earth provides, the water we drink, and our own physical body.

We can be grateful for the friends and family who share our joys and challenges, the myriad people who make up our society, and indeed, all living things and existences in the universe.

A simple way that all of us can help to heal and enliven the world of nature — and brighten our own lives — with love and gratitude is through words and expressions. For example, when walking on the earth, we can think or say things like, *Thank you, dear earth! I am so grateful to you for supporting my footsteps!* While drinking a glass of water, we can think or say, *Dear water, how wonderful you are! How refreshed and radiant you make me feel!*

As we keep thinking and speaking in this way, harmonious energy will come to permeate our existence and spread to everything in our environment, reawakening nature's power to heal itself. In living this way, step by step, we can change our behavior and return to oneness with everything in nature. Then, and only then, will the earth naturally revive.

— [*Byakko Shinko Kai*](#)

LOVE

RETURN TO THE WORLD

Return to the world means return to the real world. Return to the world of the body, the senses, the world of Nature.

The preamble to my daily prayer begins by honoring the world. ‘Creator of All,’ I whisper into the morning air, ‘thank you for this day.’

Thank you for the sun that rises and sets, for the wind that blows, the rain that falls.

Thank you for the air that I breathe, the food that I eat, and the sustenance that You provide.

May all that I do today contribute to the healing of the world, and may my heart be open enough to allow the world to contribute to my healing.

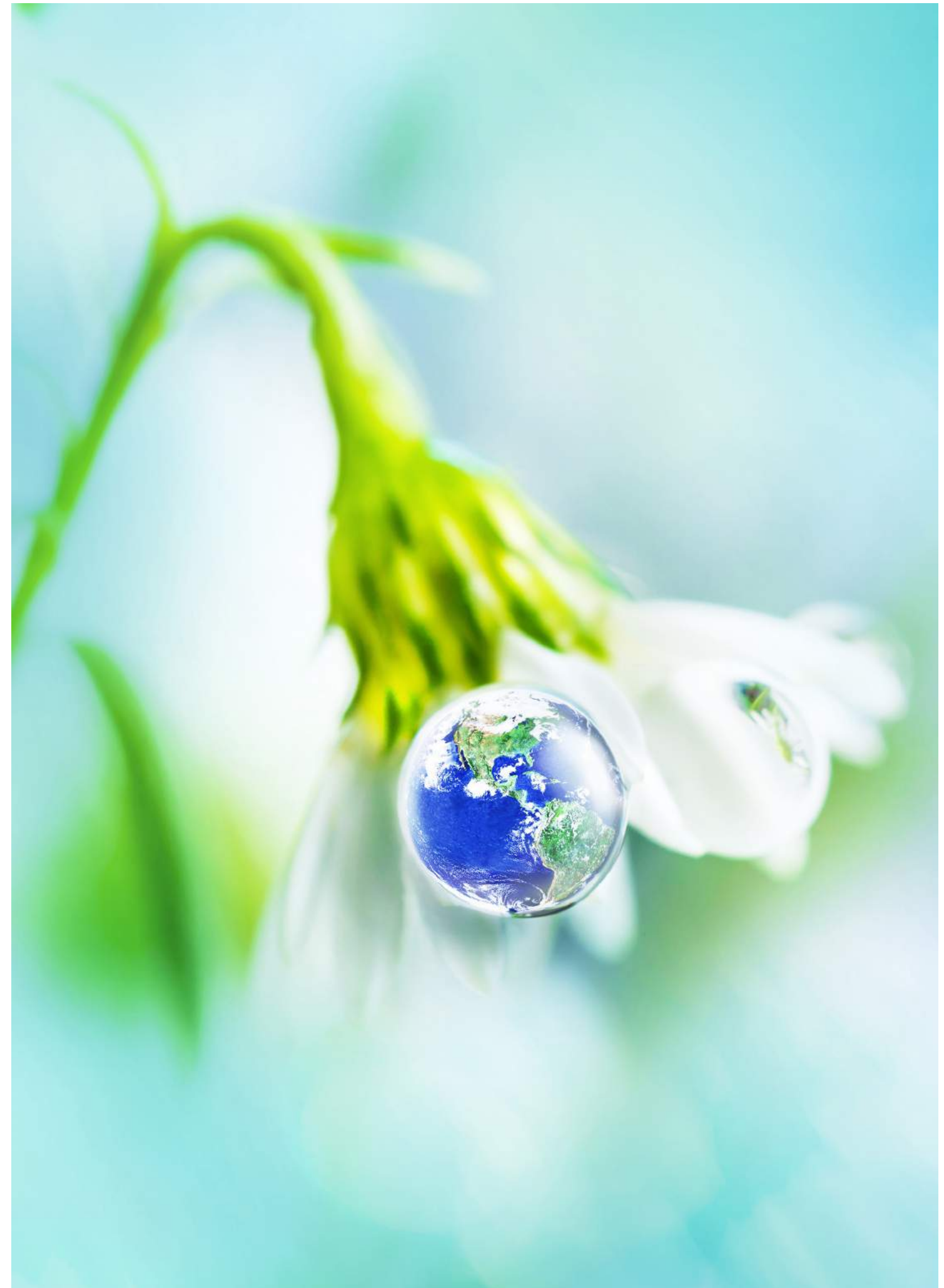
Letting the Earth heal us, and devoting ourselves to healing the earth—now there’s a reciprocal relationship worth tending.

These whispers work in a circular fashion. We start by calming ourselves, seeking peace of mind by taking in breath. And what is breath? Nature. Nature’s gift: the exhalation of trees.

As long as we are alive, the journey of spirituality always returns us to the body: we are of the earth.

— *Christina Baldwin from:
The Seven Whispers: A Spiritual
Practice for Times Like These*

EARTH



LIVING THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT: Small Changes, Lasting Results

When the Wheaton Franciscan Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP) Circle was formed in 2021, there was great excitement throughout the community to work toward a flourishing future. Yet there were also a few sighs of resignation, with comments such as “But what can I do on my own?” and “It’s just too late.”

Each one of us can do something to care for Mother Earth and her people. It may be a modest action but it can turn into a lifelong habit that nurtures God’s creation and supports simple living with compassion.

Think of your daily actions as the butterfly effect: the concept that even minor things can have an impact on larger, more complex systems. Edward Lorenz, a meteorology professor at MIT, wrote a paper in 1963 theorizing that “one flap of a butterfly’s wings could change the course of weather forever.” With one small act, you can affect real change.

During this Lenten season, our faith community was challenged with “fasting” from single-use plastics, such as grocery bags, food storage bags, and plastic wrap. Plastic pollution never completely biodegrades, according to the National Resources Defense Council. Instead, it remains in the ocean and Chicago’s Lake Michigan for years while plastic particles are consumed by seabirds, mammals, and fish with often fatal results. Items we use for mere minutes can pollute the earth for decades.

Members of the LSAP Circle lived out their fast in different ways, from new kitchen and shopping habits to recycling while on the road. “As we continue this journey of discovery of new ways of eliminating plastic from our lives, we are joining our simple efforts to the efforts of so many others, and thereby making an impact on our world,” noted LSAP convener Sister Bea Hernandez.

Sr Bea and Sr Sylvia Wehlisch purchased reusable produce bags to avoid the plastic option in the store. “These bags are made from recycled plastics and can be used, washed, and reused. This helps to reduce plastic waste in landfills and prevent extraction and production of new plastic. It also incentivizes producers of plastic products to convert to the use of recycled plastics,” explained Sr Bea.

Other plastic-free practices found in their household include buying eggs packaged in cardboard cartons, buying bread packaged in paper, using reusable beeswax wraps instead of plastic wrap to preserve food leftovers, and using zip-lock baggies made from plant fibers and plant resins that are compostable.

LSAP member Sharon Niemet stepped up her use of reusable bags as part of her plastic fast. “A checker at my local grocery store complimented my crazy collection of canvas and nylon bags, including one from a museum in New York and a gay pride tote. And I carry one or two foldup reusable bags in my purse for quick shopping trips,” said Sharon. “The Lenten fast

has encouraged me to ask the question ‘What more can I do using less plastic?’ ”

LSAP member Jeanne Connolly faced the challenge of recycling while traveling. “Not every community, hotel, or living situation makes recycling easy. This year, while away from home, my husband and I packed and hauled our recyclables. This packing and hauling created a deeper awareness of how much two people can keep out of our landfills,” noted Jeanne.

Change starts with one individual or family at a time. A first step can become a lifelong habit, noticed by others to encourage them to adopt similar creation-friendly behaviors. Soon your personal butterfly effect has taken wing and Mother Earth is breathing more freely.

The members of the Wheaton Franciscan Laudato Si' Action Platform Circle are Sr Bea Hernandez, OSF, convener, and Covenant Companions Jeanne Connolly, Carol Simler, and Sharon Niemet.

PRAYERS FOR PLANET EARTH

Ute Prayer

From the Uncompahgre Ute Tribe

Earth teach me stillness
as the grasses are stilled with light.

Earth teach me suffering
as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth teach me humility
as blossoms are humble with beginning.

Earth teach me caring
as the mother who secures her young.

Earth teach me courage
as the tree which stands all alone.

Earth teach me limitation
as the ant which crawls on the ground.

Earth teach me freedom
as the eagle which soars in the sky.

Earth teach me resignation
as the leaves which die in the fall.

Earth teach me regeneration
as the seed which rises in the spring.

Earth teach me to forget myself
as melted snow forgets its life.

Earth teach me to remember kindness
as dry fields weep with rain.

Your Planetary Self

by Clare Dubois

Let the birds take your clothes
Let the waves undo your holding back
Let the vines unravel your tired mind
And the earth savour your sweat and tears.
Let your stories burn off like rising mist,
As your past and the false floors of curbed self love
Dissolve into butterfly wings and fire flies
As your edges blur and your Planetary Self ignites.

Let the trees bathe your breath
Let the meadows embrace you
Let the mountains and the bees remind you
Let the sky flood in and allow the clouds to guide you.
Let your undoing be as total
As your becoming is beautiful –
And when the living world has climbed inside
Enough for you to feel four legs, scales and wings.
May you finally know yourself alive as all things –
Indivisible and responsible
Reborn into wholeness
Natural, Sacred and Wild

A small, light brown butterfly with dark spots on its wings is perched on a white flower with a yellow center. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green.

EARTH, WE THANK YOU

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Earth you provide such joy and
sustenance always.

May we honor your beauty and wonder
every day through out the year.

May we strive to be as creative and nurturing
in our own lives as you are naturally.

May the abundance you provide
allow us to be generous at all times.

May we learn from the seasons
to have patience and grace.

— *William Gladstone*

Author & Founder of Waterside Productions

A large, white flower with many petals and a yellow center is in the foreground, slightly out of focus. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green.