



SACRED
HOSPITALITY IN
A WORLD ON
FIRE

REIMAGINING SACRED SPACES
A REPORT BY NUNS & NONES

REPORT CONTENT

I. OVERVIEW

II. PAST:
LOOKING TO OUR ROOTS

III. PRESENT:
KAIROS TIME

IV. FUTURE:
CHOOSING NEW LIFE

V. BUILDING THE BRIDGE



OVERVIEW

From the seeds of mutual relationships among justice-seeking women religious and spiritually-diverse seekers of all ages, Nuns & Nones has been creating communities of care and contemplation to incite courageous action since 2016.

Over four years of relationship-building, we have traveled with many religious communities who are discerning the future of their land and sacred spaces—especially as religious life evolves into smaller, leaner, inter-congregational forms.

To help us understand this reality and our role in it, we launched a **participatory action research** project. This research project, our first, focused on exploring: **What are the opportunities for spiritual, ecological, and cultural renewal as we contemplate the future of religious land and sacred spaces?**

We started this project by talking to 55 leaders, friends, and organizers across our network. We spoke with people creating community land trusts, fighting for affordable housing, stewarding or launching intentional communities, directors of retreat centers, farmers, new economy organizers and cooperative builders, and, of course, many sisters of all ages. We spoke with people who are from many different backgrounds, spiritually and racially. We spoke with those building new visions of community or projects on Christian, ecumenical, multi-faith, Jewish, Indigenous, Black, multi-racial, and/or “New Monastic” foundations.

Along the way, we asked each conversation partner a common list of questions about their people and how they are responding to this moment. We also asked **“Despite, or perhaps because of, the challenges you and your community are experiencing right now, what visions are you seeing about what could happen right now?”**

Drawing from one of our root lineages of popular education, **participatory action research** is a method of collaborative research that equalizes power dynamics in the pursuit of solutions that bring about a more just and free future. In participatory action research we explore our historical and social reality together, name root causes of injustice and oppression we see, take corrective or healing action in response to these, and learn iteratively from this process of reflection and action together over time.

Additionally, we hosted two listening calls to weave together relationships and perspective across the people we interviewed, seeing many possibilities for connection, collaboration, or supporting mutual dreams. We asked, simply, **“What visions are you holding?”** and **“What else is needed to get between where you are now and where you want to go?”**

We began an exploration of these questions before a global pandemic and a new wave of collective reckoning with race shook our world. We had a natural interest in these questions given our political and historical analysis, and also the interest of many people in our network in forming committed communities.

But, in the midst of these upheavals, this inquiry has felt more important and timely than ever.

We center the demands of Black and Indigenous organizers who know that land justice is racial justice, given the systemic theft and exclusion from land as a tool of oppression and division over centuries. As Leah Penniman writes in *Farming While Black*, “since the 1400s we have been struggling to find ways to reclaim the commons....Our ancestors were forced, tricked, and scared off land.” Black, indigenous, immigrant, and poor communities have been at the forefront of this struggle, and the impacts of it.

We believe that truth-telling, radical hospitality, and reparative justice for the land and those from whom it was stolen can be spiritually healing work. Because of this, in parallel with this research, we mobilized hundreds from our network to engage in collective learning through Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project’s “Course Correction,” an online course offering a vision of Just Transition updated to meet this moment. As our friends at Movement Generation put it:

Whose land? Whose wealth? That capital was generated off of stolen Native land and stolen Black labor. We call for a return of stolen land and the wealth looted from stolen labor to those it was stolen from. We call for reinvestment of those funds and lands into reparations for Black communities to self-determine. We are committed to a #JustTransition that manifests Black liberated zones, spaces, and land, equipped with the abundance of resources they need to carry out their visions.

To explore what work is ours to do within the larger vision of Just Transition, we are listening for how we might contribute to this ecosystem in solidarity with movement organizations fighting for racial, ecological, and economic justice.

Together in shared witness of the hope and struggle for new forms of community to emerge—taking form not just through conversation but also through in-place explorations like our Pilot Residency in a convent in 2019—we have also wondered: **in addition to offering wisdom and accompaniment to new committed communities, might religious life also offer the places, the physical infrastructure, for them to happen?**

As demographics shift away from organized religion, young people have lost access to permanently organized communities with the kind of moral authority, sense of place, and “long view” of humanity that religious communities offer.

More than organizations working for justice and love in the world, we need to **build the resilience and capacity of new, committed communities willing to do the work of spiritual, democratic, and ecological repair for the long haul.**

We've known for years that religious life has much wisdom to offer in creating these new, contemplative communities. Perhaps hosting new forms of community will be the next manifestation of sacred hospitality for many of these places with whom we have been in dialogue, as part of their legacy.

This report attempts to synthesize and share what we've learned from these conversations as a gift back to those we interviewed, and to anyone holding similar questions right now. We try to offer, in service of way-finding in this challenging moment, what we're seeing as patterns, possibilities, questions, and next steps. There are limitations to the scope of the first phase of this participatory action research project, and at the end of the report we also point to future directions we, or others, might explore from here.

This is not a quantitative report, though we may produce future reports with further analysis. However, we think there are useful patterns and possibilities to share from our conversations.

Thank you to the many inspiring community leaders who have already joined us on this inquiry, and to those of you engaging with these questions with us here. We look forward to building restorative and just futures together with you, and building the bridge to those futures through mutual relationships rooted in a shared desire to repair the world.

NOTES FOR THE READER

1. Before you read on, why not take a moment right now to acknowledge and give thanks to the land you are currently on, and to acknowledge our debts to the original stewards who have tended it for generations.
2. Throughout this report we will include quotes, with the permission of the speaker. We will make clear with annotations throughout whose voice we are including as an interviewee, or someone we're in relationship with, versus someone we have included as a teacher or source of teaching that has been influential to us.
3. If you are moved by the themes of this report and desire taking action right now, we invite you to join us in supporting Black and Indigenous led efforts to secure reparations, like Black Land and Power Project or the NDN Collective, or through local reparations efforts where you are.

Thank you for reading. This is only the beginning of this work for us. Already, it has reminded us that even to be in dialogue together about how we navigate this difficult time is medicine, in and of itself. May our work also pave the way for new forms of courageous action beyond what we can imagine now. We look forward to your reactions and to exploring these questions with you.



LAND & TIME

In a Nuns and Nones team gathering in January 2020, on a paper stuck onto the wall, we listed the questions we were holding as we began our time together. Somebody wrote, "What are we doing with this week? This year?" And somebody else added in, "This Earth?"

The juxtaposition of these seemingly different concepts – time and location – made us pause. A week and a year are measures of time. How could we consider the Earth, too, a measure?

The question simmered in us and found partial expression in our naming of "focal length," the range of temporal perspective we most naturally think in. Some of us think in the short increments – the 3-month outlook, the monthly calendar. Some in the couple year range. And some in the span of a lifetime, or over the length of generations. As you read this report, consider your focal length.

Which time measurements are you most comfortable living in? How do your children live in time? How did your grandparents? In listening more closely to our rhythms, personal and collective, we learn something of how the Earth tracks alongside us.

PAST

LOOKING TO OUR ROOTS

WHAT WE HEARD

If our desire is to explore future possibilities on land, we must remember what stories the land has already lived, and how they weave with the history of Catholic communities. **There are two threads of history that are important to acknowledge: the Doctrine of Discovery and the violence that it caused, and the prophetic legacy of women religious who fought for justice, community, and a liberatory image of the divine.**

There is deep injustice to acknowledge in the roots of Catholicism, and much of this injustice is tied to land loss and theft. Catholic religious communities participated in, benefited from, and in many cases even provided justification under the auspices of mission work for colonization, Indigenous genocide and assimilation, the theft of land of the Americas from the original stewards of this land, and the theft of lives and labor from Black slaves through participation in the slave trade.

Some conversation partners, including sisters, spoke very directly to this history, and also told us what it calls us to do: to look honestly at it, to tell the truth about it, and to make repairs for it however we can. For others, this history is newer terrain, though still a dialogue about which they were very open to engaging.

Whether this is old news or new learning for our people, we cannot talk about land and Catholic communities without talking about this history.

There are many resources, with more coming all the time from our network and beyond, to help us do the work we need to do. Connected to this report is a set of resources for sisters and others interested to explore more.

There is also another legacy to draw upon in Catholic tradition. As our conversation partners shared, within Catholic social teaching, liberatory theology, Black Catholic traditions, and even new cosmology, **there are many doorways into truth and repair:**

“Our current capitalist system depends on that first seizure of land from Indigenous people when the settlers arrived. By seizing their land, we deprived them of the medicine of their land, their health, their identity. That violates one of the essential cosmos-building principles - identity, subjectivity, and interiority. If we honor the principle of identity, we would cultivate a kind of radical respect, we would seek to provide for all beings what is essential to their becoming ... which in this case would be returning all the land we settlers seized, so that eventually people could heal themselves and interact with integrity within the larger Earth community.”

—Sr. Toni Nash, CSJ, PhD, speaking on the Doctrine of Discovery

We also center the importance of imagining that repair in partnership and following the wisdom of leaders in Indigenous communities from whom the land was stolen, who shared with us their understandable skepticism:

“Landback, what does that look like in practice? I see what folks are doing and I wonder: is that conservation? Is that reclamation? Really, what is that? **What is our strategy and what do we actually mean when we say things like landback or reparations?**”

—Jade Begay, NDN Collective

“So much of what is most helpful is the way we allow each other to hear our stories. Hear from one another about why land is important. Why should it be respected? Why shouldn’t we extract from it? **This is a generations’ long conversation. We must give respect to all the people who have come before.**”

—Jaclyn Roessel, Director of Decolonized Futures & Radical Dreams, US Department of Arts & Culture

We also have histories of courageous action from which to draw. Catholic sisters have a long history of following their vocation to the margins, to meet the unmet needs of the time—even, or especially, in pandemics like this one.

Though this moment is unique, our conversation partners lifted up the history of courageous action by sisters and contemplative Catholic activists in past moments that echo the present.

Or, as one sister told us:

“A monastery, community, any group of people, a peace center, that’s their DNA—they have to be resisting. **Life is about resisting.**”

—Sr. Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, OSB

She is in good company in the Benedictine tradition, having lived in a modern iteration of this long legacy called the Pax Center, which was started by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB in Erie, PA. As Kownacki wrote about the legacy they built upon:

The early Benedictine communities were ‘resistance centers’ offering a true alternative to a destructive and chaotic sixth century. **People lived different in a monastery—giving up power and material wealth, sharing goods, respecting the earth and all living things, praying, working hard, opening their doors to strangers and helping the poor.**

—Sr. Mary Lou Kownacki in *Peace Is Our Calling: Contemporary Monasticism and the Peace Movement*

More recently, we draw inspiration from the story of the brothers of Taizé in France who literally ripped off the front wall of their chapel in 1968 to make more room for the hills full of youth, of all different political and spiritual backgrounds, who showed up for spiritual nourishment, witness, and community amid a moment of civil and political unrest and youth uprising in France, with some echos of the present in the United States.

In addition to serving as refuge for resistance, Catholic monastic communities and others motivated by Catholic social thought have also been generative seedbeds for alternative community infrastructure. As organizers of the Economy of Francesco community, Elizabeth Garlow and Felipe Witchger pointed out that Catholic social thought was the spiritual foundation for many organizers of credit unions.

This report is not meant to be an in-depth history, but there are many more stories of inspiration that came up in our conversations: Sant'Egidio, Focolare, The Grail, Stony Point, the Highlander Center, and, of course, the Catholic Worker movement. Together, these could be a lifetime's research project of their own. Here are just a couple of highlights that inspire us:

PAX CENTER

The Pax Center was founded by Erie Benedictine sisters in 1972. Repurposing the old Benedictine motherhouse, sisters and people from all walks of life moved in together, blending co-housing community with activism and “works of mercy.” The Pax Center later morphed into Pax Christi USA, the American affiliate of the international Catholic peace movement.

THE SIMPLE WAY

“It all started when... in 1995, dozens of homeless families had moved into an abandoned Catholic church building in North Philadelphia. They were told by the Archdiocese that they had 48 hours to move out, or they could be arrested. With nowhere to go, these courageous mothers and children hung a banner on the front of the building that said, “How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday, and ignore one on Monday?” The families held their own press conference and announced that they had talked with the real “Owner” of the building (the Lord Almighty!) – and God said they could stay until they found somewhere else to go.”

—The Simple Way

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE US FORWARD

It is taught that “the medicine grows close to the poison.” Could this be the moment for bringing together the pain of our histories with the medicine of our living traditions? Could this be the moment to write the chapter of truth, reparations, and healing? What are ways that these stories of courageous opening and bold hospitality might inspire us in the present, and in what ways is this moment unique?

Journalist and new economy scholar Nathan Schneider asked us: “How might this moment call for different roles and new forms of leadership by sisters and networks like Nuns & Nones?” He continued by challenging us to imagine how we might support the current uprisings by working across generational divides, in mutual relationship, drawing on tradition and honoring the leadership of youth. “How do we lift up the intergenerational collaborations we want? There is a demand for generational justice that's not being met.”

Perhaps this moment will be remembered as a time in which we re-activated seeds of prophetic courage buried beneath the soil.

"How might
this moment
call for different roles
and new forms of
leadership by sisters
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Nuns & Nones?"

PRESENT

KAIROS TIME

WHAT WE HEARD

As we connected with our conversation partners, we listened for both the urgent needs emerging for those in our network and for how sacred places are meeting these needs in creative and timely ways. We have seen how the same challenges and risks that sacred spaces faced before the pandemic—challenges to remain financially sustainable, to maintain vital community infrastructure, to prevent the loss of land and housing to the speculative market—have only accelerated in this crisis. And we have heard how trying this time has been for so many sisters, especially those in isolation and lockdown.

“At a time when you’re needed more than ever, you may not be able to keep going. We are trying to keep faith that from this death will come a life, and creating opportunities for connection while many of us are more disconnected than ever.”

—Sr. Mary Trainer, RSM

We are hearing from our partners in the Retreat Center Collaboration, a network of more than 150 retreat centers both Catholic and not, that well more than half of US retreat centers are at risk of permanent closure as COVID-related disruptions continue. The same is true for schools and other facilities. Dozens of Catholic schools will permanently close in the fallout of this pandemic. We heard about the devastation of this moment from many of our conversation partners:

“Many faith institutions were struggling with declining congregations and limited financial resources pre-COVID. Because of this, we know that some may not come back when we get to the other side of this awful pandemic, as is true of entities across all sectors.”

—Robin Emmons, National FaithLands Coordinator

“With COVID’s impact in 2020, centers face existential threats, and there is organizational trauma and grief to address.”

—Ben Scott-Brandt, Coordinator, the Retreat Center Collaboration

“In the beginning of the pandemic, we were focused on trying to take care of our elders and make sure our employees kept getting paychecks. Now, the priority is keeping both the sisters and our staff safe.”

—Sr. Mary Kay Brooks, School Sisters of Notre Dame leadership

We also heard about sacred spaces creatively transforming in response to this moment. Despite monumental challenges, there are many examples of radical hospitality emerging, some literally overnight:

SISTERS OF ST.
FRANCIS OF ASSISI,
WISCONSIN:
CLARE HALL

In partnership between the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi transformed their 90-bed convent, not occupied as of January 2020, to house unhoused individuals affected by the pandemic.

IHM SISTERS,
MICHIGAN:
MARYGROVE CAMPUS

The sisters and the conservancy that oversees the 53-acre campus of Marygrove transformed a student dorm, Florent Gillet Hall, and their student center into a 250-bed isolation space for homeless individuals who are at risk or have tested positive for the coronavirus, with food and other services being provided by the city and a philanthropic vendor.

CHARLES RIVER
EPISCOPAL CO-
HOUSING ENDEAVOR,
MASSACHUSETTS
(CRECHE)

A network of mixed-income, inter-generational co-housing communities in partnership with the Episcopal Church in New England, has been taking in queer undergraduate students who couldn't go home when the schools closed, housing them for free or by donation.

And Many More: The Dominican Sisters of Peace, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, and others all have undertaken similar conversations about adapting facilities to meet urgent needs during the pandemic, often with spaces that are already unoccupied or in a transition. Many retreat centers, such as Pearlstone, a Jewish Farm and Retreat Center in Maryland, or Stony Point, an ecumenical community in New York, have converted commercial kitchens into emergency food operations. We hear more of these stories every day.

Many communities have remained closed to the outside, often because of the vulnerability of their own on-site community. Even so, many shared surprising silver linings. The crisis has offered a rare chance to slow down and reprioritize their own community's needs, including making time for conversations, care, and longer-term work usually lost in the constant churn of running hospitality businesses or other urgent work.

We heard this from Avi Kruley, a young Co-Director of Mt. Madonna Center in the Santa Cruz mountains; Andrea Livingstone, from EarthRise in Petaluma, California; and several members of Stony Point Center in upstate New York; who, not for lack of financial strain, nevertheless still welcomed the change as a chance to reprioritize long-accumulated vision work in their communities.

Often, for white-led or privileged spaces, especially in the midst of an uprising for Black lives, this has meant prioritizing anti-racist work needed to shift access to or ownership of these spaces to Black and indigenous stewards. For sisters, it has also been a moment of digging deeper into their founding spirit and mission for guidance.

"We're going to get some clarity about our values and what we stand for, about our direction and our mission [because of this moment]."

—Sr. Lisa Kane, Dominican Sisters of Racine

"I am hopeful that [this moment] is an opportunity for a true refounding of [our congregation]. We already knew the demographics would mean a transformational change in our size in the near future. COVID's challenges to U.S. economic and healthcare models might also help us untether from these problematic systems, too."

—Sr. Quincy Howard, Sinsinawa Dominicans / NETWORK Lobby

In some cases we also heard that the spiritual life of communities had a chance to deepen or evolve in beautiful ways because of this moment. For example: sisters who are not allowed to offer mass in the Catholic church, by necessity of being physically isolated and without a priest, celebrated Easter by and for themselves. They shared how energizing it felt to re-imagine the liturgy in creative ways: simply, and together in community.

WHAT NOW?

It is a hopeful possibility that communitarian changes arising in response to crisis may become more permanent shifts, pointing to even broader ecosystem transformations of sacred space stewardship into the future. Even after the first waves of this moment pass, many communities who have run retreat centers for decades may shift some of their focus: continuing the long-term anti-racist work they have begun, building alternative income streams based in the regenerative economy, or opening up new lands for community agriculture.

Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina did just that, before the pandemic, with the launch of their new Institute for Regenerative Agriculture, an 18-month fellowship program for people “of any or no faith tradition” who are interested in both monastic living and sustainable agriculture. Five Oaks Retreat Center in Ontario is also opening up new income streams based in regenerative economy and sacred hospitality. Some partner organizations we spoke with, including Goodlands and Faithlands, are well-equipped to support other communities to create such programs.

These would be welcome developments for many of the young people with whom we spoke, who expressed an accelerated desire to live in community, in committed relationships with people and land, and a readiness to make bigger shifts sooner rather than later:

“I want to be in a **sanctuary of space**. I know you can find that in the land and I’m really interested in physical spaces that have hosted that over time. I’m craving that. I’m craving a deep dive with folks.”

—brontë velez, Lead to Life

“I am hungry for vibrant, local living community right now. **I feel ready to raise my hand** and move somewhere and build something.”

—Elizabeth Garlow, Economy of Francesco

“There’s something to be said for the idea of honoring and connecting to the land that we’re on—it’s where we are—**the land is the relationship we can have first.**”

—Jaclyn Roessel, US Department of Arts and Culture

“Downsizing was one of the few ‘givens’ in how the congregation would change. The pandemic has me also thinking about **a return to our historical, geographic roots**. Maybe our future looks more like an enclave community at [the Sinsinawa Dominican] Mound [in Wisconsin] caring for the land in a rural, agricultural region and ministering in other ways, virtually.”

—Sr. Quincy Howard OP, Sinsinawa Dominicans / NETWORK Lobby



Our Nuns & Nones team shares in the visions woven throughout this report. It's why we're here! We are doing so in many ways, individually—from Christina Tran's Mt. Caz in Corvallis, Oregon, to Katie Gordon's commitment to living and working with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, PA, to Alan Webb and Sarah Bradley's dream in motion of building "Backyard Hermitages" in the East Bay, to Brittany Koteles's neighborhood community house in Washington DC.

We are traveling with sisters, like Mercy sisters Mary Waskowiak, Judy Carle and Mary Kay Dobrovoly laying the ground for a house of prayer and action at the border in San Diego, inspired in part by Sister Mary's trip to the El Paso and Juarez border with Adam Horowitz & Rachel Plattus.

And we have engaged in collective explorations, from a Pilot Residency in 2019 to more recent visions of creating new "movement houses" with our partners that can respond directly to the needs of these time. Yet we share the same yearnings and seeds of visions that many in our network do, too, and are personally invested in watering them.

We can't help but see the possible solutions at the intersection of these needs: the need for new visions for sacred spaces in a moment of transition, in order for them to remain viable community infrastructure for generations to come, and the deep desire by many in our network to make deeper commitments to community rooted in place.

"Sacred Hospitality" and similar concepts were present across many of our interviews. Our teammate Adam Horowitz has written about this, and this research opened up new avenues of inquiry about what a commitment to sacred hospitality might mean. In the words of some of our conversation partners:

ON SACRED HOSPITALITY

"This moment is calling for more of an affirmative stance - first to do some hospicing support, and then quickly moving to leap to nourish the seeds of a new system."

—Seth Kirshenbaum, Resist

"We are building space where individuals find **support for their spiritual journey in order to sustain their work in justice** and resistance."

—Jean Richardson, Director Kirkridge Retreat Center

"The best clue I have at the moment is this. The first obligation of Sacred Hospitality: Each member has **a responsibility to contribute their spiritual gifts** to the community."

—Jamie Fleishman, Nuns & Nones organizer

FUTURE: CHOOSING NEW LIFE

*"We can't go back to 'normal' and have a healthy earth, a healthy economy."
—Sr. Mary Kay Brooks, School Sisters of Notre Dame leadership*

Across the board, all of our conversation partners told us that they didn't want to "go back" or "return to normal." This moment we are passing through is changing us all in ways from which we cannot and should not retreat.

We, all of us, are working to "choose new life."

From these conversations, three truths illuminate and agitate us toward what new life might look like.

- As women religious evolve into new, smaller and leaner forms, a **great wealth of land and community infrastructure will change hands**. To whom, we do not yet know.
- In this time of economic, and ecological crisis, institutions whose members demand their moral leadership must **lead the way toward tangible acts of truth, repair, and regeneration**.
- A new wave of leaders seek the fortification of community, commitment, and **a place to dedicate themselves to the long, difficult work of reclaiming our lives**, our rights, our institutions and our faiths from racialized capitalism.

We have watched these elements weave together into bold, shimmering glimpses of a different future. How might unlikely alliances uniquely summon more truth and healing for the land, more radical acts of sacred hospitality, and more control and ownership of resources to impacted communities, making emergency responses to crisis the seeds of long-term life-giving transformation for generations to come?

What else is possible? What follows is just some of the inspiration we have heard.

BENINCASA COMMUNITY

A lay monastic community, previously offering hospitality in Manhattan, but temporarily relocating to Queens as they gather resources to establish a permanent home:

“We are more determined than ever to open a Green Monastery as an active demonstration site of how to honor the ecology of a place AND integrate the struggles of communities most abused by our industrialized, global food systems.”

—Karen Gargamelli-McCreight, Benincasa Community

CANTICLE FARM

An intergenerational, interracial, interfaith community and urban farm in East Oakland.

Canticle started as a single family home with Catholic Worker and Franciscan roots. Over time it has slowly added adjoining properties and housing for people returning from prison, and rebuilt wetlands in the midst of the city to bring back wildlife. Recently Canticle also became the caretakers of formerly Catholic worker-run land in the Sierras.

“We dismantle walls in our yards, minds and lives.”

—Canticle Farm

CREATIVE RESPONSE

“Retreat centers going from an ‘endangered species’ to being **‘national parks for the soul’** - land that is held in common, with community co-living on the land.”

—Jean Richardson, Kirkridge Retreat Center

“Two of the folks in our house (a baker and barista) got laid off, and have been **baking bread** in the house and selling it. Wonder what it would cost to put in a commercial kitchen into this old church?”

—Isaac Everett, CRECHE Community

“We are turning our monastery and retreat center into an integrated space where retreatants, seekers, and visitors can **come and be transformed**, shifting from the 'Old Story' of separation to the **new story** of sacred hospitality towards the earth and towards those at the margins.”

—Fr. Jim O'Shea, OSP

“An **intentional community** with and in support of young adults in New York City.”


—Sr. Sheila Smith, RSCJ

“Trinity Woods just had our ceremonial groundbreaking and in the end will be sisters and other seniors from the **community co-living** with single mothers going to school at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee.”

—Sr. Mary Kay Brooks, SSND

“The future of Cranaleith has many visions mostly on hold... but the tiny house, where Sr. Leslie will live and minister, continues to be built as a **conscious response to our interdependence with all creation**. We hope this initiative will hold transformative grace, helping us discover how we might live into **relationships of mutual replenishment** with earth and one another.”

—Sr. Mary Trainer, RSM

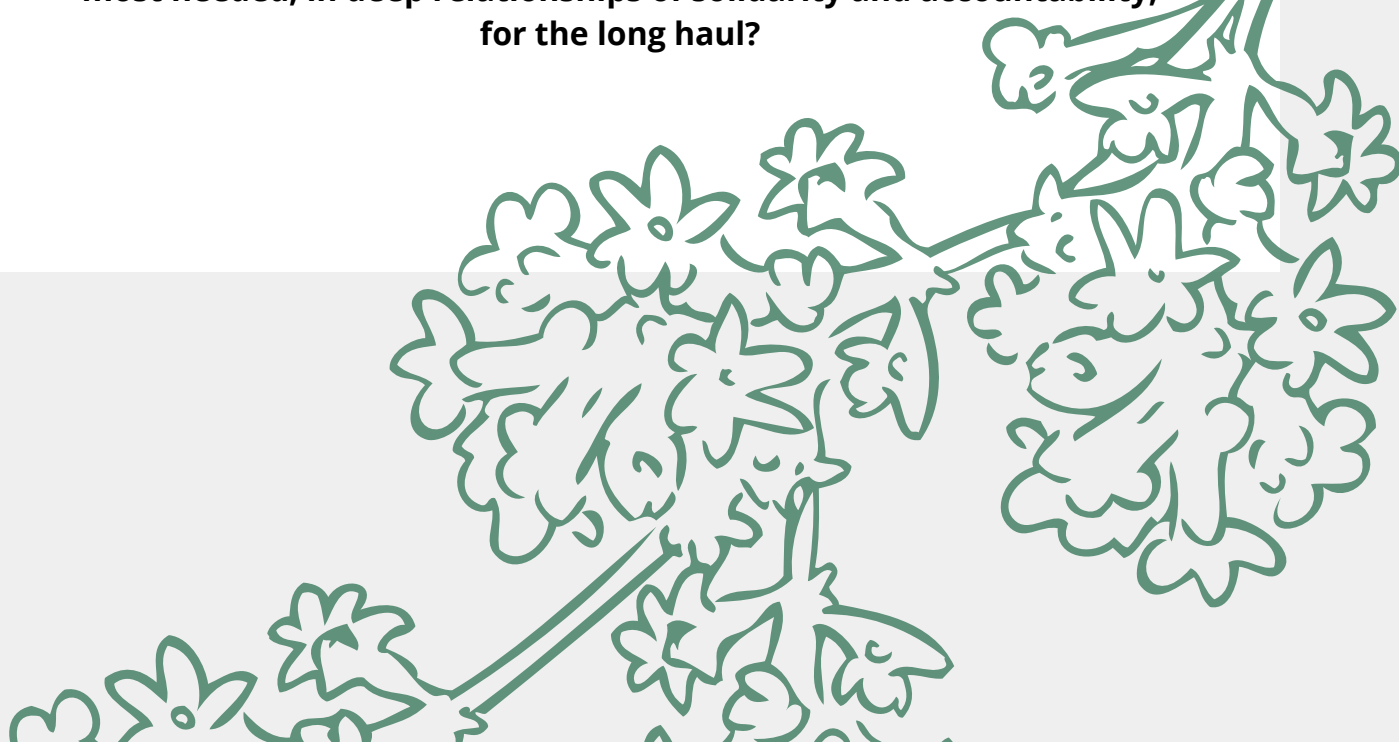


We know well how difficult it can be to travel this road. There are many barriers to each of these visions successfully getting off the ground. Our conversation partners know this, too, and have experienced many disappointments. In one of our two group listening calls, several participants brought up the grief and frustration of not finding receptive hosts, after years of false starts, who were actually ready to “sign the dotted line” in the end.

Even those visions that do become real will face more challenges ahead. As Diana Leafe Christian writes in *Creating a Life Together*, “between 1990 and 1995 the Fellowship for Intentional Communities saw a 60% increase in new intentional communities and ecovillages, but only 10 percent of these actually succeeded; ninety percent failed.”

The common struggles of any community are amplified for Black, Latinx, or Indigenous-led communities. Soul Fire Farm in New York, the Earthseed Collective Land Collective in North Carolina, and Ekvv-Yefolecv Maskoke Ecovillage, in addition to Indigenous-led land trusts and other organizations dedicated to land justice and reclaiming sacred sites, like the NDN Collective, Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, and the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, to name a few, face many of the systemic barriers and risks their ancestor communities and organizations always have.

We are asking ourselves: what role can this network, with the many resources we have access or proximity to collectively, play in removing barriers and providing support for these visions becoming real? How can we mobilize and shift resources to where they are most needed, in deep relationships of solidarity and accountability, for the long haul?



Excerpt from *Towards an Infrastructure of Sacred Hospitality*

by Nuns & Nones organizer Adam Horowitz

What becomes possible when a generation of young people play the role of prophet — not by choice, but by necessity — speaking truth to power, envisioning and demanding just futures, and energizing a broader public to bring those futures into being?

These young people know what time it is. They know what's at stake. They feel in their bodies the peril encroaching on their futures. And so they rightfully ask: why should we go to school, sitting through standardized tests meant to turn us into cogs, when the house is on fire?

Surely, their questions won't end there...

Why should I go to college, when the house is on fire?

Why should I take a bullshit job, when the house is on fire?

Why should I buy into a lifestyle predicated on extraction and consumption, when that's what's destroying my future, the future of all those I love, and the future of all of life?

Another set of questions inevitably follows:

And if not college, and bullshit jobs, and consumption and American individualism, what then?

The kids are ready to walk out. What will they walk on to?

"I look forward to the day when Benedictine homes will be known for harboring criminals who nonviolently break laws to protect life. I would like all those who protest the building of more nuclear weapons, who refuse to serve in war or pay taxes for war, to flee to convents and monasteries where every effort would be made to explain their case to the wider public, every risk taken to protect them."

—Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB in *Peace is Our Calling*

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

We have work to do to get to the future we want. But what is ours to do? You offered us many beautiful reflections and clues:

“Nuns & Nones could be a long term partner in developing political economic formation and formation for communal life.”

—Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan, Movement Generation

"For faith communities, how can we begin the work now of re-imagining those spaces that may be left vacant when the proverbial dust settles? **Is it possible for faith communities to begin inventorying what may exist to create new opportunities to grow food, provide employment, create community, and build a local food economy** through a ministry that exists outside on the land, or in new ways inside the traditional worship space based in the theology of agriculture? How can FaithLands through Agrarian Trust, begin supporting faith leaders in envisioning what may be possible?"

—Robin Emmons, National FaithLands Coordinator

“I thought I was alone in this moment - this conversation is showing me that I'm not.”

—Sr. Sheila Smith, RSCJ

"I've really gotten an understanding of how deprived Indigenous advocacy and climate work is, and **how much opportunity there is to take down those barriers and create openings for our communities to get the support that they deserve.**"

—Jade Begay, NDN Collective

Where might we, our readers, our conversation partners, and our network go next? We see three areas of further inquiry and action that this research points us toward:

TELL THE TRUTH

What would it look like for sisters, seekers, and the Catholic church to call for truth-telling and reparations together?

INVEST IN STABILIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION

How do we enable new, long-term visions for sacred spaces in transition to emerge, especially those which don't have resources to do so and are precariously at risk of being lost? How, in the process, might we support long-term transitions of sacred spaces into the commons, stewarded and owned by front-line communities for the long-term?

INVEST IN PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

How might we remove barriers for those who are ready to leap into new ways of life in committed community? What might it look like to create some of these new communities together, intergenerationally, with sisters? Who are the teachers, what are the experiences, and what are the supportive conditions—including things like spiritual direction, mutual aid infrastructure, and collective healthcare—needed to do this well?

We know that our work will involve continuing to build community, map our ecosystems, connect needs with offers, and mobilize resources across our network. We invite readers and partners to engage with or expand on this work in your own ways, and share what you are seeing and learning. As we go, we will continue to listen and share what we are learning, and what we don't yet know.

We keep learning from Black and Indigenous leaders of movements for land reparations and landback that to separate our current reckoning with race, colonization, slavery and genocide from the reality of land theft and wealth distribution is to separate the spiritual from the physical. It is bypassing. We must understand the unjust accumulation of land and wealth as the root and the result of racial capitalism, and the shifting of control and ownership of those resources as the engine of our transition to something new.

To meet the spiritual, cognitive, and material responsibilities of truth, reconciliation, and healing, Nuns & Nones is taking these steps to follow our own recommendations.

Targeted Working Groups

The richest result of this project is the power of deepening relationships across ecosystems of land justice and religious life. Throughout our conversations, and in particular during listening calls, we saw synergy and curiosity among our conversation partners. Nuns & Nones has a role to play in convening collaborators from across this ecology. Emerging from listening calls, we will work with participants to create and support 2-4 participant-driven working groups. Topics will depend on interest, but preliminary interests include storytelling about sacred land, explorations around stabilization and transition fund development, and curriculum development for just land transition. Groups will meet on a monthly basis, convening with other groups quarterly.

Vow of Repair

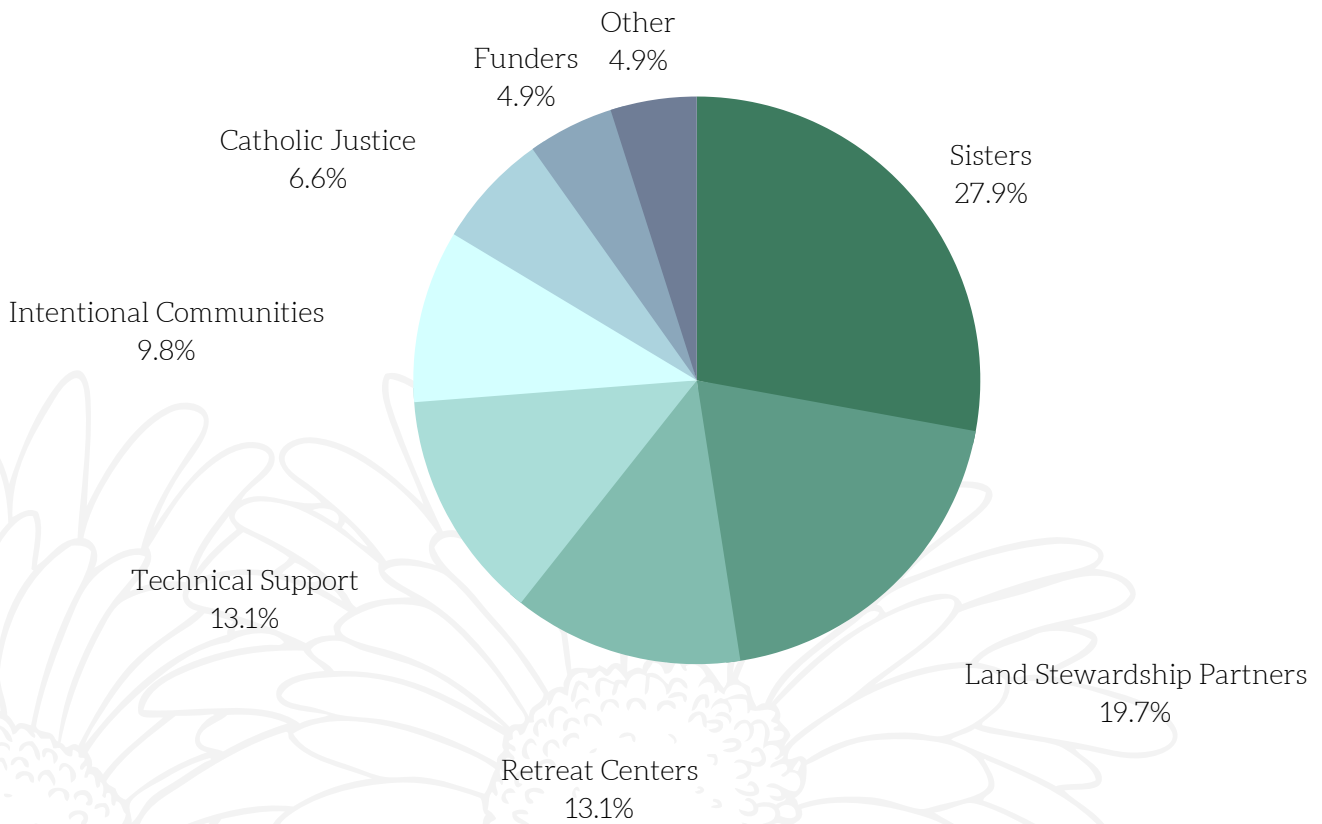
Building from the legacy of sisters' vows, and younger seekers' desire for new containers for commitment and community, Nuns & Nones is structuring our community learning around a Vow of Repair in 2021. The program will include education, practices, commitments and support for small groups as they explore shared commitment, accountability, and reparations. We will provide tools for participants to examine and commit to the individual, communal, institutional and systemic manifestations of repair in their own lives. Sisters and others with access to land and wealth will be supported in imagining the future of their assets in integrity with a Vow of Repair, and our partners will be ready to support with further explorations through technical support and advising.

Sacred Spaces Stabilization Fund

We are working to catalyze partnerships to create a democratically controlled fund to stabilize and transition land at risk of sale into the speculative market, and to lower barriers for commoning of land on a large scale.

Do these questions resonate with you? Would you like to join us in these next steps of inquiry and action? Please reach out to hello@nunsandnones.org.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?



A CLOSER LOOK AT LAND

In our accounting of the partners with whom we spoke who were stewarding land and in discernment about its future, we talked with people stewarding over 2000 acres of land, with an average of around 150 acres per site. Just over 20% of these have conservation easements or land trusts secured, to protect the land in perpetuity, which means nearly 80% do not have such protections in place.

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Mark Clarke, Community Works
Jean Richardson, Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center
Nathan Schneider, Media Enterprise Design Lab

LEARN MORE

As we enter into a period of even deeper exploration of the ideas in this report, there are countless resources for reading, watching, and reflecting. Here are just a few to get you started.

Understanding reparations through a Catholic lens:

"The Church must make reparation for its role in slavery, segregation,"
Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, PhD. National Catholic Reporter, June 2020

"Call To Action calls on white Catholics: dismantle white supremacy in the Church and in the world," May 2020

Dr. Tia Noelle Pratt's Black Catholic Syllabus, June 2020

Reparations: A deeper dive

"Teach a Man To Fish parable is a lie - Ed Whitfield explains why" (4:50), filmed at the New Economy Coalition CommonBound Conference

"The Case for Reparations," Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic, June 2014

Reparations: Dreaming and Imagining - Case Studies and Visions

The case studies in the Movement for Black Lives Reparations Toolkit

The journey of the Religious of the Sacred Heart's journey to uncover their past of slavery and build relationship and repair with the descendants of those their congregation enslaved. Read the sequence of events as told by the sisters, and a detailed timeline of different actions of repair.

REFLECT: What stories of harm exist in your lineage, community, or affiliations? What kinds of actions could move toward true repair? Who should be consulted to learn more about what repair would look like?



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