

TRANSCRIPT

Introduction to Land Justice

Sarah Jane Bradley, August 2023

Hello and welcome. Thank you for joining us for this Introduction to Land Justice!

My name is Sarah Bradley. I'm part of the Nuns & Nones Land Justice team, where we are creating land transitions centered on racial and ecological healing, and doing so specifically in collaboration with women religious and movement partners. Through our flagship Focus Community program, we work closely with 7-10 religious communities to incorporate land justice into their property planning process and upcoming land transitions. Using a cohort model for multiple communities at once, our work focuses on education and accompaniment, creating a community of practice, partnership building with potential stewards, and technical support from our faculty of aligned practitioners in law, real estate, and land trusts. To support the broader ecosystem of land justice, we also offer public programming to educate and mobilize other landowners, people of faith, and aligned activists to practice land justice in their own contexts and spheres of influence.

We define land justice as the practice of centering social, racial, and ecological justice in decisions about how land is used, loved, and governed by people. There are three key, and intertwined components of land justice:

1. Protecting land from extractive development
2. Regenerating the health of land & waters
3. Shifting equity and control of land to communities who have been systematically dispossessed of land, especially Black and Indigenous stewards

Our hope is that by the end of this session you will know a whole lot more about land justice and why it is needed. We hope you will come away with an understanding of how the Church and its purported Doctrine of Discovery created the conditions for our extractive economy and private property system, and the outcome of those projects: the

climate crisis and pervasive & systemic racism... It's also our hope that you'll come away with an understanding of how land justice, including concrete examples of it, can be the medicine that moves us towards racial & ecological justice... and how you can be an active part of this movement.

We'll start by sharing a bit about how Nuns & Nones Land Justice came to be. The first thing to say is that the Land Justice Project was born out of relationships, through unlikely conversations and listening to the moment.

Nuns & Nones began in 2016 as a place of encounter. Encounter between older women religious and younger, community-oriented activists of many spiritual backgrounds, many of whom did not claim one religious affiliation, earning the nickname "nones," as in "none of the above."

These encounters took the form of dialogues and meetups all over the country, and centered on shared interests of justice, spiritual formation, and community. I found this movement when I was in my late 20s, exploring important questions for my own life: *What kind of commitment and spiritual community could I belong to or cultivate? What might nourish, root, and sustain me in the long-haul of justice work, in my vocational call, and living my values? What conditions do I need to set up to actually challenge the structures of capitalism and practice something else?*

I was so deeply inspired by how religious life was a practical pathway to a radical economy and way of life: Generations of women were pooling their resources so that they could support one another to live counter-culturally and in accordance with their deepest values and the call of Spirit. And that's what I wanted.

While these N&N encounters unfolded, our nation began to more intensively face long-standing existential reckonings. The intertwined crises of pandemic, climate collapse, and racial injustice revealed just how deep the roots of colonization and

racism run through our history, and how pervasive their impacts still are in our society today.

Meanwhile, we witnessed our friends, the sisters, move through the experience of their communities growing smaller and needing to make tough decisions. We found ourselves in conversations with words like “diminishment”, “divestment” and “disposal of tangible assets.” Most communities of women religious in the country are either currently facing, or will soon be facing the need to make long-term decisions about what to do with land and property. This is also true of many churches, parishes, and even families as the Baby Boomer Generation ages.

So, we began to ask... Given what time it is on the clock of the world, to quote the late great Grace Lee Boggs... Given the ecological and racial healing that so desperately needs to take place in our time, what then shall we, “the Nuns & the Nones” do together?

So we started to have a lot of conversations. We talked to sisters, we talked to retreat centers, we talked to grassroots movement partners -- that is, climate justice groups, rematriation & reparations leaders, solidarity economy collectives. It was through asking that question, and the conversations it prompted, that we began to see our role.

We saw that so many grassroots groups, especially Black & Indigenous collectives, are ready to take on and steward land but continue to be blocked from access and ownership. Furthermore, because people of color have been the most impacted by extraction-based racial capitalism and by the effects of the climate crisis, they often hold some of the most clear, powerful and creative perspectives about how to shift course, find solutions, and restore the land while restoring their own communities.

That means that one of the biggest barriers to climate and racial justice initiatives today is access to land.

We also found that there was no community or support for religious landowners to get more creative and bold about how decisions about land could best reflect their values.

Landowners needed to be organized in order for land justice to happen, and that it simply wasn't happening at scale.

So, with the steadfast encouragement of sisters and movement partners, the N&N Land Justice Project was born in 2021, with the purpose of supporting religious communities to incorporate land justice into their property planning.

Land is Key

Now... Decisions about property can feel daunting, and they are often held in a very narrow "business mindset" rather than a holistic or values-rooted one. People often separate their "ministry" or "justice work" from these kinds of decisions.

However, in the first two years of this work, it has become clear that LAND is the KEY to both RACIAL and ECOLOGICAL healing in this country.

Who owns it... Who governs it... Land plays an integral role in how communities heal among themselves and with other communities... Land holds our stories, and she is the site of our country's great original sins. As such, repairing those harms through the decisions we make about land today can be our hope... and it's how we will create a liveable future for all of us.

So. We see the potential for property decisions to bring forth powerful transformation in our society... If people of faith were to center land justice in their property decisions, it could be one of the most significant things we do... it could help tell a new story of what's possible.

But in order to tell a new story, we have to understand the old ones we're living in -- the stories of how we got here, and the roots of land *injustice*, so that we might move from a foundation of truth towards repair

LAND INJUSTICE

In his writings about sustainable economies, EF Schumacher wrote,

"One who uses an imaginary map, thinking that it is a true one, is likely to be worse off than someone with no map at all." ~ E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful

The Doctrine of Discovery

For 500 years, when it comes to our dominant culture, and especially land and property, **this** has been our map.

This is one of the three 15th century papal bulls, or legal decrees by the Pope, that make up the Doctrine of Discovery. These decrees compelled European nations to quote "invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue" all non-Christians.

Through these bulls, the Church that declared any land not inhabited and ruled by Christians was available to be "discovered" and claimed outright.

These papal bulls acted as the legal, political, moral, and spiritual justification for some of the most heinous projects of the next four centuries: the genocide of Indigenous peoples and theft of Indigenous land, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and, by 1914, the colonization of 84% of the land on Earth by European nations, including the land mass now called the United States.

These decrees were inherently white supremacist and Christian supremacist and justified grotesque violence. As many of you are aware, the Vatican recently repudiated the Doctrine, stating that its ideas are antithetical to Catholic teaching. However, it's critical to clarify that this announcement did not formally repeal or rescind the doctrine, it did not take responsibility for its implementation, it did not put resources towards making amends or reparations, nor did it extricate it from our current legal system.

The Doctrine of Discovery is an active legal doctrine in the United States. It is a linchpin in the foundation of modern property law.

200 years ago this year, in a case called *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, the Supreme Court enshrined these papal bulls into US law, citing that quote "discovery is the foundation of title, and this overlooks all proprietary rights in the natives."

This is one of the first cases that new lawyers learn in law school. It is considered one of the bedrock cases in U.S. property law to this day, and set the precedent for everything

else that would follow. The papal bulls have been cited in the Supreme Court as recently as 2005, in a case that ruled against the Oneida people who were trying to recover their stolen land in what is now upstate New York.

Again, at the time of their writing, the papal bulls that make up the Doctrine of Discovery served as the justification for European settlers to seize land inhabited by non-Christians, but also to behave as if non-Christian and non-European people were less than fully human. This legacy is still present with us today, and not just as an echo -- but as an active ideology that is practiced through our dominant culture and systems and takes many shapes.

Many of you will recognize this image from school history books. It depicts “Manifest Destiny”, or the westward expansion of white settlers into what is now the U.S.

Notice that as the angel, and the white farmers are moving in, the Native people, and the buffalo, are fleeing, almost disappearing off the page. White settlers believed they had the RIGHT to kick people off their land, to destroy their way of life, and to take whatever they found. This belief is rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery. This image also promotes the false idea that as the U.S. grew into what it has become, the peoples Indigenous to this land just disappeared and gave up (obviously not true!).

What’s not pictured here is that settlers also believed they had the right to capture and enslave Indigenous *African* people, and bring them here to work the lands they stole, *creating an economy that depended on the domination not just of Native land, but of Black bodies, knowledge, and labor.* We see how this system shape shifts in the many ways that people of color are dispossessed of land, how immigrants of color are exploited for their labor, and how the people who control land and political influence find new ways to extract profits through destructive behavior. Again, this is an economy that is built upon extracting wealth from the land and the labor of people of color -- and it bears a direct line of connection to the papal bulls.

We can see this story through another image.

This is a place you'll likely recognize and know by the name of Mt. Rushmore. However, this place, located in the Black Hills, has a much older name -- He Sapa. It is one of the most sacred grounds for the Oceti Sakowin -- the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota people. It is their emergence point, akin to a Christian's Garden of Eden. Led by the U.S. Army and the greed of gold mining interests, white colonists stole these sacred hills using violence, knowingly breaking a treaty in which the U.S. had agreed to never touch these hills. Then, into that sacred stone, a part which the Lakota called the Six Grandfathers, they carved the faces of four of their white leaders -- each of whom participated in genocide against Indigenous people.

During President Trump's July 4th celebrations at Mt. Rushmore in 2020, a group of Lakota activists exercised their right to free speech and their responsibilities as the rightful stewards of the Black Hills, demanding the return of the He Sapa, which under treaty law, is still their land. These activists were arrested by police dressed in riot gear and criminally charged simply for standing up for the rights guaranteed to their nation by treaty with the U.S. Government.

This picture is an apt metaphor for how we got to where we are today: through land theft, destruction, and cultural domination. And where we are currently is that 98% of land in the U.S. is owned or controlled by white people, rather than Indigenous people, who up until recently, had communally stewarded this land well since time immemorial.

There's an important reframe needed as we understand the story of colonization.

Many of us grew up with the idea that the U.S. is a "Nation of Immigrants." However, immigrants take on and adapt to the local customs, language, laws and governance, and other social systems of the place they move to. That is not what happened on Turtle Island. The more accurate description for the dominant U.S. system and culture is that it reflects a "Nation of Settlers."

Settlers "destroy in order to replace."

Rather than adapt to Indigenous economies and ways of life, white settlers violently imposed their own. Rather than respecting the sovereignty of the nations they were moving to, white settlers attempted to eradicate them and forced them into dependency on the colonial state.

So, to review the land story here -- it was through the DoD that Indigenous lands were stolen, and allotted into parcels and given or sold to white people, by white colonial governments. (There's a lot more we could get into about exactly how this happened -- involving treaties, U.S. trading posts and Indian Agents, Patents, the Homestead Act, the Indian Removal Act, the Dawes Act, so so much more -- but for now this simple statement will stand. Land was stolen from Indigenous peoples by the U.S. government and then given freely or sold for pennies on the dollar to white settlers.)

Land which continued to be passed down and sold as private property, enforced and policed by the state. We see these hard boundaries in fences, barbed wire, and no trespassing signs. For many people, the only choices are to accept the lines or face state violence.

Now, once these grids of private property were created by the U.S. government, the state and settlers adopted this idea of "fair market value" of land -- that is, a monetary value for land that would be a price that the highest bidders in society are willing to pay.

Fair market value of land is often thought of as natural and inevitable, but it's important to remember that it's a fairly new practice in human history and there have been many other ways societies have made decisions about land.

"Fair market" just means that the people with the most money — not the people with the deepest relationships or the ones best positioned to steward land -- get to decide what happens to land. (As such it might be more accurate to call this concept unfair market value.)

And, as will likely surprise no one here, in our current society, the highest bidder is most likely white.

Today, the median white family in the U.S. has a net wealth of \$147,000...while the median Black family has a net wealth of \$3,500. This is but one facet of the racial wealth and wellness gap.

The racial wealth gap comes from an accumulation of many forms of harm to communities of color -- the projects of colonization, enslavement, and land theft that we've been talking about, but also redlining, incarceration, and many other forms of discrimination.

On the other side of the gap, white people in our society have accumulated massive amounts of wealth because of a system that has been designed for us to acquire and then pass down property to heirs over centuries.

White families have 16x more wealth than Black families. The average Native American household has 8 cents of wealth for every dollar of wealth for the average white American household, and Native Americans have the highest national poverty rate at 25.4% compared with 8% for white Americans.

This is of-course a self-perpetuating wealth gap. We can talk about this dynamic with academic and economic terms like "primitive accumulation" and "regulatory capture" but the result is simple: because white settlers and the colonial state stole Native land and Black labor, they amassed enormous wealth; and because those with the wealth can leverage it to direct political agendas, they protect and increase that wealth and status through our various social systems across time.

In land, we see that the result today is that 98% of private rural land, and 95% of urban land, is owned by white people.

Meanwhile, people of color continue to be the labor backbone of our economy, comprising 70% of the farmers in this country. So farmers of color are 70% of the agricultural workforce but own less than 2% of the farmland. This means we all probably ate something today grown by a farmer of color who works on white-owned land.

So, the DoD set up our current paradigm and system of treating land as a commodity, but it did not just make an object of the world -- it gave individuals the right to destroy

the land they “own.” As a landowner, you get a whole bundle of rights that convey with title, like the right to lease, to occupy, to sell, and to develop, but you also “get” the right to destroy it.

So, not only did this doctrine justify the stealing of land and the enslavement of human beings, but it also supported the concept that land was a thing that could be bought, sold, and mistreated for profit.

Last April, we hosted a conversation with four Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous leaders about the Doctrine’s repudiation. In that conversation, Diné (Navajo) elder Pat McCabe put it simply: “the Doctrine wasn’t just a moral or ethical imposition; it was the beginning of the destruction of this Mother Earth in her entirety.”

The Church’s logic of white Christian superiority — over *all* creation — was cemented into a modern economy that hinges on the extraction of people and the Earth, for the profit of a few.

With that, we need to recognize some plain facts.

Since those Papal Bulls and the colonial contact that followed, in the U.S. we have lost 90-95% of old growth forest, 99% of prairie, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of our topsoil. It is estimated that we have about 60 harvest seasons of topsoil left, and we are losing topsoil up to 100 times faster than it can be replenished. Meanwhile, land is being developed at a rate of 1,500 acres a day, and from the Willow oil drilling project in Alaska to Enbridge oil pipelines in the Midwest, our elected officials, banks, and businesses continue to promote and profit off of destruction.

Again, all of this has happened during the centuries and decades when land has been in the overwhelming control of white settlers and the state. 98% of private land. So we have to ask the question... if settler colonialism is “destroying to replace” -- replace with what? What kind of society? What has the Doctrine of Discovery created in and through us?

To turn the tide in this society, we need to recognize our need for leadership that is appropriate for the task at hand.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes, “When Indigenous peoples remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.” He implores Catholics to build relationships with Indigenous people as the primary dialogue partners when it comes to care for the Earth.

Of course, science backs these assertions: while Indigenous people make up less than 5% of the world’s population, they protect 80% of the world’s biodiversity.

And we can see it here in this aerial image of the aftermath of the Bootleg Fire in Oregon, where the completely scorched area was managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the slightly damaged but still surviving area was co-managed with the Klamath, and the area that made it out the best was under sole management of the Klamath tribe. Indigenous people, when allowed to practice their communal traditions, know how to care for and steward the land they have co-evolved with. This is one reason why the Landback and climate justice movements are so intertwined.

When we make these connections, it becomes clear that racism and colonization are the root of our climate crisis. And the Church bears a significant responsibility for the project of colonization that has led us here and maintains the status quo.

And so even though the Vatican has publicly rejected the statements made in these bulls, the damage has been done.

It is not enough to say, “sorry -- we were wrong.” While apologies are necessary, alone they are insufficient.

As Catholics, if we want to engage in the work of healing and repairing both ecological and racial relationships, we need to grapple with this history, and our role in it.

And we need to work to undo the damage -- to both land and people.

Sarah Augustine, a Pueblo minister from New Mexico and leader in the Mennonite Church, says of the Doctrine of Discovery, “What was done in the name of Christ must be **UNDONE** in the name of Christ.”

After hundreds of years of the racial harm and ecological destruction that has been brought about by the Doctrine of Discovery, we are today witnessing a growing movement to address these harms, a movement to engage with the world from a completely different paradigm.

The legacy of the DoD **CAN** be undone. Pope Francis also wrote in *Laudato Si*, “now is not an era of change but a change of era.” By doing land justice, by taking responsibility for this legacy and joining the movements for mending it, we can contribute to that “change of era.”

The Catholic Church, as an actor and instigator of the project of colonization, as well as the single largest private landowning entity in the world, has the potential to leverage vast resources to tangibly address the climate crisis, regenerate the health of land and its communities, and correct the wrongs of the past -- and women religious and lay Catholics in the United States can lead the Church towards what is right.

Now, you might be saying, “okay, I get why we need land justice; I get its importance in this moment -- but how? what does it look like?” Well... I’m going to show you!

MODELS

I’m going to give some examples, but I’ll also say that, when it comes to making choices about land, many of us have the false idea in our head that we can either prioritize ecological healing or racial justice, but not both. Or we hold a rigid binary in our mind.

We imagine land justice to be more like this -- a colorful space in-between, full of creativity and possibility.

And in practicing land justice, in making a new map for how we make decisions about land, the path is also going to look a little bit like this.

There's no one way up this mountain. If the goal is land justice, and we're walking toward it, every community is going to be working with a different context. And if you think about it, when we're moving without a map, we actually have to pay really good attention all of a sudden, right? Where's the sun rising? Which way is north? Where's the water? What's the terrain? So I'm going to invite you into the practice of attentiveness, of looking for clues for how YOU might move forward, as you receive a few stories.

I will also just say, I feel like I have the best job in the world, because I get to be a student of promising examples like these. And I'm here to say, they're happening. And they're out there. This is a time that requires immense imagination and creativity. The Land Justice Project is here to help support that process. I haven't learned as much as I have in my life than I have in the past two years as we've opened these questions up.

So I'm going to give four short examples of how religious landowners have taken steps towards land justice.

1. SHINNECOCK KELP FARMERS

This is a picture of the Shinnecock Kelp Farmers, six women Indigenous to the area called Long Island.

This project began because these women saw that all the Hampton Bays on Long Island, including Shinnecock Bay, were being polluted by billionaire septic systems and golf courses, causing huge algae blooms and dead zones.

Now, the Shinnecock carry an ancestral practice which is extremely helpful in this situation: growing kelp. For at least 10,000 years the Shinnecock have grown kelp as a food source, a versatile fiber for traditional uses, and as an ecological management system. Kelp filters carbon dioxide at a rate 20 times that of a forest on land. It also filters nitrogen out of the water, which is what creates those algae blooms.

So, the Shinnecock wanted to reclaim their traditional practice in order to clean the waters. But, because of the system and story we've named and are living in, their reservation is relegated to the marshiest part of the bay. So they needed better coastal access. And guess who had some?

Why, the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Brentwood, New York! Their nine-acre retreat center property is right there on the bay. (I'll shout-out that the CSJs in Brentwood are one of our first 7 Focus Communities.) The Shinnecock knew the CSJs because some of those sisters had been showing up to their protests for a few years. So Becky, the elder of the Shinnecock group, she's second from the left, went up to sister Joan Gallagher and said, "This is what we want to do." And Joan said, "Absolutely. Whatever you need, we'll help."

So, together, they turned a building into a kelp hatchery and the Shinnecock revived this 10,000 year old practice. The sisters donated a car to one of the farmers who was having transportation issues so that she could keep coming and farming. And what Joan says of this relationship is "Being in relationship with the Shinnecock in solidarity must be at the heart of who we are. Because a future emerges from the relationships that we cultivate in the present."

So in this example we see that making a commitment to a reparative relationship of solidarity, and for that commitment to be a core part of identity, is a step towards land justice. Even if it hasn't yet resulted in a formal transition of land, it's creating the conditions in which land justice can happen.

(I just love this photo. This is the Shinnecock heading out to weed the kelp)

2: CULTURAL USE EASEMENT

This is ["Klay-el-ting"] Hlel-din. It's an original village site of the ["tse:ning-xwe"] Tsnungwe tribe in California. This land is their sacred village site – where they would hold all of their ceremonies. It's now privately owned by a white person, who was building relationships with the tribe, and asked them, "What do you want? How can we

be good partners?" In this case, the tribe said, "You know, we don't actually have the capacity right now to own this land or be the primary managers. At least, that's not what we want right now. But we do want to come back to our village site, and hold our ceremonies, like the coming-of-age ceremonies that are so important for our youth." They wanted to be able to access the land, and they wanted that access to be legally protected.

After that, the landowner worked to "remix" a conservation easement into something called a "cultural use easement."

You're likely familiar with conservation easements, whereby an owner gives another entity, often a Land Trust or Conservancy, the right to make sure that no new development happens on that land. With those easements, rights are given and protected forever; they go with the land. The same is true for cultural use easements, except that the rights are slightly different.

With a cultural use easement, a tribe or members of a tribe are given the right to access and use the land, for gathering medicinal plants, practicing ceremony, or any other cultural or educational practices. And that right is protected also in perpetuity. So here, the trauma of broken promises and treaties that many Indigenous people have faced is kind of "eased" by this agreement.

This is kind of a blurry picture, but it shows the ["tse:ning-xwe"] people doing their coming-of-age ceremony for young women, the Flower Dance, at their ancestral village site for the first time in 300 years. They got to do this ceremony knowing that they'll be able to return to this sacred site and do this dance every year from now on.

3: SWEETWATER CULTURAL CENTER/STONY POINT CHURCH

This is Stony Point Church in the state of New York. It's a Presbyterian Church that, back in its heyday, had about 200 people in pews on a Sunday. By about five or so years ago, that number had dwindled to about a dozen. And so the Presbytery made the hard decision to close the church and absorb the members into a neighboring church. They planned on selling the building, but the church congregants had recently begun building relationships with the Ramapough Lenape tribe, who are the original

inhabitants of that land. They had started making connections after being inspired by the Presbyterian Church's repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery in 2019.

So it was because of those relationships, they did something else instead of selling it. They gave the church and the land to the Ramapough Lenape and with them, created the Sweetwater Cultural Center.

Here, we can see a photo of the signing of the transfer of the deed with the leader of the presbytery, along with Chief Dwayne Perry of the Ramapough Lenape.

And so with that transfer of property, the Sweetwater Cultural Center was created, a space of hospitality, cultural practice, and ceremony for Indigenous people in the region but also around the world, as the U.N. Headquarters is in nearby New York City. We have to remember that Indigenous ceremony is so deeply connected to the Earth, to being people *of the land*. So that reclamation of ceremony, which was illegal until 1978, is also a reclamation of relationship with their land.

So now, as Indigenous leaders and advocates travel thousands of miles from home to represent their nations and defend their lands, and arrive in a remarkably foreign and stressful urban setting, with the Sweetwater Cultural Center, they have a space to go to where they can freely practice their religion, rest, and resource themselves spiritually for the global struggle for Indigenous sovereignty.

This is an example of a direct transfer of title, where ownership transfers -- which is the strongest end of the spectrum of land justice because it shifts power, equity, control.

In this case, the deed to the land was gifted to the Ramapough Lenape at no cost, with the deed going to a new nonprofit which tribal members govern. In contexts where donating land is possible, it can be the most appropriate, as the land was stolen to begin with. I'll debunk a myth right now and confirm that it's completely legal for a 501c3 to donate land to another entity, including another c3, if that donation is in alignment with the organization's mission and values.

While donating land can be the most just and fitting course of action, I'll caveat and say that we've also learned that some BIPOC collectives would prefer a simple purchase rather than a gift that comes with strings, because it can be a cleaner process with clearer autonomy. But even with a purchase, land justice is possible -- as you can transfer land through a bargain sale -- that is, selling the land at a below-market price. A seller can always work with a desired buyer, say a tribe, to determine a price and a timeline that is feasible for them, and can also offer to support in fundraising for purchase as any legal or administrative costs.

4: CENTRAL VIRGINIA AGRARIAN COMMONS

This is Callie Walker. She's a Methodist minister in Virginia. And that picture on the left is her family's 100-acre farm that she inherited from her father. Callie and her husband dreamed of having an intentional community on the land there, but they were running into some barriers, and not quite finding people that were "sticking." One day, Callie went to an organic farming conference.

There, she heard a presentation by Duron Chavis, a farmer and food activist in the nearby city of Richmond, where she learned about the history of Black land dispossession in the United States. In the last 100 years, Black farmers went from owning 14% of all farmland in the US to less than 1% because of campaigns of racial terror as well as racist heirs law practices.

Duron is trying to reclaim the Black community's relationship with land and access to healthy foods in and around Richmond. He is creating a whole BIPOC-led food system that's bringing healthy food and the Black agrarian tradition back into his community that have been denied it for generations. In hearing Duron's story and learning of his work, Callie realized, "THIS is the community dream I was meant to serve. It's actually yours to live out and I want to support you in doing that."

So Callie donated her farm, which is now part of a network of properties in and around the Richmond area -- a network that is training a steady stream of Black farmers, from small urban plots to large-scale farms like that on Callie's family land.

And, this entire network of properties is communally owned in a really special and different kind of land trust called an "Agrarian Commons," which is designed to protect long-term farmland tenure for farmers. So not only is this land going to good use, but an entirely new model of commonly-held land stewardship is thriving from it, with local governance at the grassroots level, and national support.

This means that she gets to live out her days on the family land, right alongside this amazing land justice project. So she says, "I'm trading my land for the best neighbors in the world."

There's a growing number of Indigenous, Black, and POC-governed land trusts with the explicit purpose of recovering, protecting, and regenerating lands and reviving communal and ancestral practices.

Callie's story also shows the kind of healing that can happen -- and the kind of new relational weaving that wasn't there before -- when those who hold much of the power and ownership relinquish their control over vision and recognize that we should resource people who hold a new (or perhaps ancient) vision.

So in all of these stories, we see again, there's no one way. But all of these stories start with relationship and solidarity, and they end with extending trust and sharing control. In all of them, there's a lot of things to figure out -- it's not always easy by any means -- but there is love and joy present.

These stories are a testament that the decisions that people of faith can make about land can literally create the groundwork for the kind of world, the kind of economy, the kind of lives and paradigms that we dream of -- and that this earth needs.

You might be thinking, "Okay, but is something like a 2 acre plot even meaningful? Enough to change a paradigm?" I'm here to say that that is what a place-less economy wants you to think. But the future is going to be local. Place-rooted. Loving the land. And a climate just future will happen in places of all shapes, sizes, and locations.

Again, we're looking at this change of era, which includes our very worldview of what matters or what counts as significant.

CLOSING

You might be familiar with this image from Meg Wheatley. This is an image of a dominant system coming to a close, and an emergent system arising from the ashes.

We are in a change of era. And many of the institutions around us are in this moment of transformation. So we're kind of between worlds. Perhaps you feel that acutely where you are. Meg Wheatley does a lot of work to identify different roles and jobs related to this transition work. With land justice, we're talking about who is resourcing the new paradigm. So who's helping to create the places where this transformation can happen? The places that can lay the literal groundwork for a justice rooted, climate resilient future.

Religious communities can be very powerful in this moment. If communities opt to do land justice, and do it together, it could change so much of what's possible in this world. Not only because you can change what happens on the lands that you love, but because you're one of the most forward thinking, culturally powerful constituents of the largest private landowner in the world, the Catholic Church. So what you do, and what you do, alongside other religious communities, could change the way the largest private landowner in the world thinks about land.

Imagine if land justice were the new precedent for how any religious group made decisions about the future of their property. Imagine what kind of future those decisions could open up. We need communities to help make those futures possible by rolling up their sleeves and exploring new models.

But this work doesn't have to happen in isolation or silos. The Focus Communities Program is designed to create a community of practice for women religious from all over

who are learning how to bring this vision to life in their own context. Together, we are creating new stories on sacred lands. So we hope you'll join us.

Please click the link below to learn more about our Focus Community program. And thank you so much.

<http://nunsandnonnes.org/focus-communities>