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Sr. Rosalia Galmin, SSps

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On Sunday, September 1, 2019, the catholic community of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, together with the Greek Orthodox community of Chicagoland joined an ecumenical service in giving thanks to God for all the beauty of creation and to recognize and encourage all the conservation efforts of God's disciples.

7 sisters (Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, and Sr. Dorota Maria Piechaczek from our Northfield community, Sr. Elwira Dziuk from the Waukegan community and Srs. Agathe Bramkamp, Monica Zhang, Rosalia Galmin, and Pre-Novice Yolette Dorce from the Grayslake community joined the OLPH parishoners and the members of the Greek Ortodox community in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, Glenview IL to pray and reflect together in thanksgiving to God for all of creation and calling us to become more aware of the beauty and also the vulnerability of creation as well as our duty to protect, preserve, actively restore and bring healing where destruction and negligence has desecrated God's gift to us.

This was the fifth anniversary of collaboration on an ecumenical prayer service. It was presided over by Bishop Mark Bartosic who presented a special reflection on ecological awareness. This was followed by a lecture from the Greek Orthodox Scholar Rev. Dr. Deacon Perry T. Hamalis. He caught our attention with the surprise in the title of his lecture: "Love God, Love Thy Neighbor, Love the Trees". Below I tried to summarize the important points he made from the Orthodox perspective on the relationship of Theology, Ecology and Human dignity. We all are united in our common concern for the suffering of nature and slowly come to understand how deeply it is connected to the suffering of human dignity. The story of the liberation, of the marginalized and excluded people which begins with the exodus is continuing and calls us to work together in order to protect the right to human dignity.

Modern slavery is directly linked to the enslavement of creation. The entire world is the body of Christ just as human beings are the very body of Christ. The way we respect creation is a reflection of the way we respect our fellow human beings. The social problems that tear at the fabric of our humanity, such as modern slavery, child exploitation, ruthless confiscation of land, hunger amidst abundance are parallel to the destruction of the ecology in its many forms and places around the world. The abuse of the environment is the abuse of human dignity. All ecological problems along with its massive pollution is directly connected to social problems and poverty.



Pope Francis says in "Laudato Si" that "today we have to realize that the true ecological approach is always social and has to become a social approach. The cry of the earth is the cry of the poor. The reality of division of environment is happening according racist attitudes. In the city of Chicago we can draw a map that divides areas of blue, orange, and red. Blue being the wealthy Chicagoans; with easy access to good facilities, connections to politicians, etc. Orange signifies the middle class. Red connotes the Chicago of the economically poor; who have little access to good education, good facilities, work, fresh food etc.

Modern human slavery is happening in almost every country especially in some countries in Asia. The Recruitment of underage workers and low payment for their work is happening in some companies. The most affected by this unjust treatment are the poor. This afternoon of reflection made us acutely aware again of this connection between environment, the Love of God, and love of neighbor. "Love the Trees" meaning the environment, is seen in the way we love God and love our neighbor. Through the action of planting and caring for trees, we express the love and care for our fellow human beings.