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Green sisters featured in *The Atlantic*

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Eco Catholic

Amid the zero degrees temperatures here in the Midwest, I recently received a "heads up" email from a long-time friend in California that warmed my heart; and if you care deeply about our planet, it will probably set yours a-glowing, too.

The message came from Allysyn Kiplinger, the founding editor of the *Ecozoic Times*, an online journal devoted to Fr. Thomas Berry's universe story-centered philosophy. She thought it noteworthy that several members of the Sisters of Earth's creation care network have made it into the October pages of *The Atlantic* magazine.

The story, "Nuns with a New Creed: Environmentalism," profiles the network, also known as Green sisters, and features the work of five religious communities, three in the U.S. and two in Ireland.

"These women are digging gardens and offsetting carbon," wrote Angela Evancie, the piece's author. "They're as well-versed in solar and geothermal technology as they are the Gospels of Luke and John, and some wear Carhartts and work boots like they're habits.

"At the heart of the women's action," Evancie continues, "is a belief that the changing climate and world demand a new kind of vocation -- that *Ave Marias* won't cut it anymore, but maybe clean energy will."

"The Judeo-Christian tradition is so beautiful, and it has such wisdom, but it doesn't have a lot to say about fracking," Dominican Sr. Miriam MacGillis, founder of the Blairstown, N.J., earth literacy center Genesis Farm, said in the article.

Some other highlights from the article:

- In 1982 MacGillis started one of the country's first community-supported agriculture programs.
- After a \$56 million investment in 2000, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary motherhouse -- all 370,000 square feet -- became LEED certified, with a three-acre wetland for recycling gray water on the Monroe, Mich., property.
- The Mercy Sisters of Ireland's Clonfert diocese, in County Galway, endured a "clash between the old world and the new world" in establishing An Gairdin ("the garden," in Irish), an ecology center and organic garden.
- Amid 160 acres of balsam forest in Vermont sits Green Mountain Monastery, a Passionist sisters-run retreat center and Berry's final resting place.
- Elsewhere in Ireland, the Dominican sisters of County Wicklow converted a convent into an ecology center called An Tairseach, where they explore the universe story and hold Masses in natural settings.

It seems so blessedly appropriate that *The Atlantic*, a secular magazine, would carry a story about Sisters of Earth, a religious group. The Green sisters' core message -- that divinity is present in all of nature -- was key to Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief system, as well.

Emerson, a Unitarian minister, poet, essayist, philosopher and abolitionist, was a founding member of *The Atlantic* in 1857. He was known for speaking out against the prevailing belief of the day -- that material and physical things were more important than the spiritual. Emerson believed in a spiritual universe, created by an "Over-Soul." He greatly influenced nature writer Henry David Thoreau.

The Encyclopedia of World Biography describes Emerson as representing "a minority of Americans with his unconventional ideas and actions, but by the end of his life many considered him to be a wise man."

Will groups like Sisters of Earth one day be honored and emulated for their wisdom by the majority of human earth residents? One can only hope and pray that it be so.

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