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# OUR PRESENCE

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FSM Mission and Focus  
Spring 2020 Quarterly Report

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## Continuing courageously

As COVID-19 impacts lives around the world, we remain steadfast in our mission to be present, through prayer, relationship and support, with all those facing great difficulty. We are especially present to those of our sisters and community who have been impacted by COVID-19, and are

keeping you all in our prayers. Please read our special blog post in response to this challenging time—see attached. We maintain our focus on compassionate care of creation in collaboration with others, now and always. As we experience this current time together and continue courageously, we also revisit key moments over the first quarter of 2020.

## Meeting the Pope: a note from John O'Shaughnessy

In February, I traveled to Rome for the annual board meeting of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM). FSM has long supported GCCM's vision for a connected, worldwide movement among Catholics on the journey of ecological conversion, fostering right relationships with creation, and lifting up both the voice of the earth and the voice of the poor.



This annual meeting already held great significance, as 2020 marks both the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, the Pope's Encyclical Letter on Care for Creation, and the fifth anniversary of GCCM. But our visit took on even more significance when it

was confirmed that our group would have the unique opportunity to meet with Pope Francis. Not knowing exactly what to expect, we arrived at the Vatican on a Thursday morning dressed in our Sunday best.



Pope Francis entered and warmly greeted each one of us. After an introduction by Cardinal Tagle, a long-time partner to GCCM, Pope Francis graciously asked each person in our circle to share about themselves. What we expected may be 15-minute meet-and-greet (continued)

(continued: Meeting the Pope) became a deeply moving, hour-long discussion. The Pope listened intently to each of us. His eyes brightened at my mention of FSM's focus on "compassionate care of creation."

Pope Francis thanked us for our work and shared about his own ecological conversion and the birth of *Laudato Si*. He motioned in my direction as he affirmed that the work of caring for our common home is necessarily compassionate and deeply maternal. He encouraged us to continue, even as we encounter violence and destruction in the world.

The Pope's leadership on issues of social and environmental justice, is a meaningful example as we seek to care for our common home, both collectively and individually. I left this memorable meeting moved by Pope Francis' intentional presence with our group that morning and a renewed energy for our Mission and Focus.



## Environmental injustice in the Metro East

The residents of Centreville, Illinois have long faced sewage-contaminated water flooding their community. While this issue has been going on for several decades, it has been worsening, and over the past two years, there has been a renewed effort among residents to hold those in power accountable for these unacceptable conditions. With the partnership of attorneys Kalila Jackson from the Metropolitan Equal Housing and Opportunity Council (EHOC) and Nicole Nelson from Equity Legal Services (ELS), Centreville residents have formed an active committee and are systematically advocating for the renovation of the sewer system. The FSM Leadership Team, Ryan and Katie attended a Centreville Resident's Committee meeting on January 14 to hear the community's experiences. FSM Leadership made a gift of water pumps to help the community address immediate needs, and FSM is proud to support their important ongoing advocacy.

In this photo (right), Sr. Judy shares FSM's support at the January Centreville Resident's Committee Meeting.



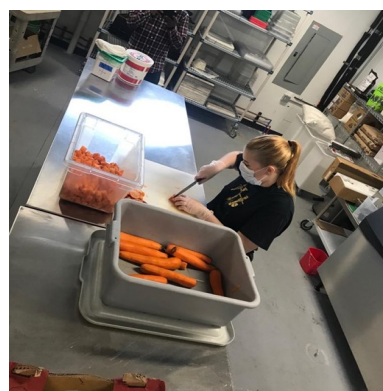


## The Chicago Frontlines Funding Initiative launches

In late February, Katie and Ryan, traveled to Chicago to be with the members of the Chicago Environmental Justice Network (CEJN) – a group of grassroots organizations protecting their communities and working towards environmental justice in the Chicago area. These leaders do important work to protect their neighborhoods from harm while also proactively building regenerative economies and healthy communities. Even so, they have long been under-resourced and overlooked by mainstream environmental networks and funders. With a common goal of changing this reality, FSM and the Regeneration Fund partnered with the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) to start the Chicago Frontlines Funding Initiative (CFFI). The CFFI provides grassroots leaders in the Chicago area with the resources and support they need to build healthy and impactful organizations, beginning with a cohort program under the leadership of Dr. Antonio Lopez. The CFFI will continue throughout the year, providing leaders with resources they want to strengthen their organizations, bringing in additional funders to join the movement, and providing space for cohort learning.

## HOSCO opens their North Sarah Food Cooperative at just the right moment

Before the coronavirus pandemic hit, it was long a goal of HOSCO Foods to open a kitchen on North Sarah which would strengthen local food processing capacity and provide a space for local entrepreneurs to grow their food businesses. FSM has supported this vision for several years, but never did anyone imagine that the North Sarah Food Cooperative would open its doors just as schools, their cafeterias, restaurants and businesses closed due to a global pandemic sweeping into the U.S. In a pivotal moment, HOSCO made their space available and partnered with local chefs to prepare meals for St. Louis Public School students, senior citizens and families in need. In just the first three weeks, their team distributed roughly 6,000 meals and plans to continue serving the St. Louis community in this way. We're grateful to Gibron Jones and his partners for their dedication to serving St. Louis, not only in this crucial moment but also through their long-term efforts to improve our local food system.



## Chicago EJ leaders respond to both COVID-19 and an implosion

With the added burdens and unexpected challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders of the Chicago EJ Network immediately launched into action together by setting up an emergency response fund for its members and the communities they serve. These communities always experience heightened environmental threats and are being particularly impacted by the pandemic. This emergency fund is helping to provide emergency financial support, food delivery for the elderly and those in-need, technology needed for remote work, and more.

In addition to their regular EJ work and response to COVID-19, our partners at LVEJO have been leading the response to an unscrupulous assault on their community's public health. With little notice and an appalling lack of remediation efforts, Hilco Development Partners went forward with the

demolition of a retired coal smokestack, covering the nearby residential neighborhoods with a thick layer of dust filled with unknown toxins (see photo below). This kind of neglect for community health is always unacceptable but especially heightens environmental injustice in the midst of a global pandemic. FSM supports the Chicago EJ Network and LVEJO as they help their communities be resilient in the face of both COVID-19 and this irresponsible implosion.



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## Be present with us

**Prayer Request:** Please pray for all those impacted by COVID-19. Please also pray for our collaborators who seek to continue caring for Creation under new and extra challenging circumstances. Remember—even during this time apart, we are all connected.

**Laudato Si Week, May 16-23:** This year marks the fifth anniversary of the release of Laudato Si'. During Laudato Si' Week, Catholics all around the world will reflect on the messages of Laudato Si' and pray for a more just and sustainable world together. You can find several virtual events by going to [laudatosiweek.org](http://laudatosiweek.org)

**Worldwide Day of Prayer, May 24 at noon local time:** Find the common prayer to be recited around the world attached to this mailing.

**“Love Letter to the Earth” event, May 24 at 2pm:** Our partners at Trocaire in Ireland are hosting a virtual event including poetry, music and speakers celebrating Laudato Si. Email Jane Mellett at [jane.mellett@trocaire.org](mailto:jane.mellett@trocaire.org) for a website link to view this event.

**If you have questions or comments about this report, please contact Katie Balfany, Program Associate at (314) 768-1650 or [kbalfany@fsmonline.org](mailto:kbalfany@fsmonline.org)**

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