

Earth Charter Indiana Turns 10

by [Diana J. Ensign](#)

"Let ours be time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life."

– Closing of the Charter

On the lower floor of Marian University's Allison Mansion, a roomful of people has gathered to celebrate Earth Charter Indiana's 10th Anniversary. Among those in attendance are leaders from across the state representing the faith community, academic institutions, the Peace Learning Center, grassroots organizations, the legal system, and the arts.

There are people in their 20s and some in their 70s. The common theme: Sustainable is Attainable. As John Gibson, Founder of the Earth Charter Indiana chapter aptly notes, "We are part of something hopeful and healing. We are about preservation of the earth."

The sustainability Bible

Ten years ago, not many had heard of the Earth Charter. Even today, the document which serves as an international framework to achieve a sustainable future is unfamiliar to most.

Gibson explains that the charter itself was drafted during the RIO conference on Sustainable Development in 1992, a landmark conference where, as Gibson says, "the world came together to try to figure out its future." The Earth Charter was then recognized by world leaders who understood the need for outlined doctrines in securing a sustainable future.

As Gibson tells it, "The leaders mobilized people around the planet, on every continent, from almost every profession, to articulate the principles and values that we share as a human family." The process took nearly a decade. It involved gathering input, writing drafts, sending out revisions and obtaining feedback, until there was a consensus — among thousands of people. The current version was released in June 2000.

The Earth Charter contains four core values and 16 action principles, mobilizing eight regional transition teams and hundreds of collaborating organizations, all pursuing one goal: "Sustainability."

According to the Preamble:

"We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future ... we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. The main goal: a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace."

More than 4,000 organizations, comprising millions of people across the globe, have formally endorsed the Earth Charter — it's been translated into several languages. In the United States alone, more than 2,200 organizations voiced support for the charter. As noted by the Earth Charter Initiative, a worldwide network of charter advocates, the document "is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for

building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century." According to its supporters, "it is a vision of hope and a call to action."

Building momentum

What began as a small group in Gibson's living room —with co-founder Jerry King and about 35 individuals — later became the first Earth Charter Indiana summit held at Marian University (then Marian College). With at least 400 people in attendance, the inaugural conference took place on September 29, 2001, shortly after the unanticipated, horrific events of 9/11. As Gibson recalls, "It was a gorgeous Saturday afternoon, and people needed to be part of something that was hopeful and healing."

Over the past decade, the summits have continued to grow. Some gatherings were held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Indianapolis, then the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and later St. Luke's Methodist Church.

In 2006, the focal point for the conference began to shift, beyond the city. Earth Charter Indiana, Inc., a nonprofit organization, started to embrace statewide recognition.

Today, Gibson notes that everyone cares about the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we consume — the energy we need to keep things going. "That's what Earth Charter Indiana is all about," he says. "It gives us a set of guidelines for building sustainable communities."

Those guidelines apply across the board — to businesses, educational institutions, families, individuals, youth, religious communities, governments, communications and media, and the arts.

"In the beginning," Gibson explains, "we had the Declaration of Independence. Now we have what can be considered a declaration of interdependence." Gibson's conviction is strong and his vision unwavering. "The Earth Charter connects all the dots to serve humanity and the planet," he says.

A new Indiana story

The Earth Charter merges a reverence for life with ecological integrity and social and economic justice; it functions under ideals like democracy, nonviolence, and peacemaking. Gibson emphasizes the added necessity in Indiana, where Earth Charter is "connecting sustainable innovations with public awareness and appreciation."

He continues, saying "People who may not ever have known about these things can learn that sustainable, creative innovations are happening right here, in our own city. Everyone gets a fuller picture of what is happening and what is possible and what it really means to live sustainably."

Our focus now, Gibson says, should be "Sustainable Indiana 2016." Earth Charter Indiana will be a green component of Indiana's Bicentennial. A true visionary, Gibson is enthusiastic about the state's potential to become a leader in green innovation. But, like the Earth Charter itself, his work uses a holistic approach. "That means peacemaking, justice work, local democracy, and respect for all life."

Gibson is proud of what the Indiana chapter has already accomplished. "This is our story," he says. "We must come together at certain points and make things happen that couldn't otherwise happen." Citing several examples, like an Earth Charter class taught at Butler University, the Irvington Green Initiative, and everything from urban homesteads to farmers markets, Gibson says Indiana can go on to become a national leader in green innovations. "We believe the momentum is with us, in Indiana, to develop that kind of national image."