



### THE GREEN ISSUE — ON BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF MOTHER EARTH

The April edition of the magazine *U.S. Catholic* has several articles and lots of practical suggestions on the issue of global climate change and what we can do to be better stewards of the earth.

I am sure that we at the parish could do a lot more to be eco-friendly. Perhaps some of you can help us with this important issue. I realize and respect the fact some of you may not see global warming as a serious issue. In 2001 the U. S. bishops issued a statement on climate change called *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and Common Sense*. In that statement the bishops among other things spoke about protecting the environment for future generations. They write:

*The common good calls us to extend our concern to future generations. Climate change poses the questions "What does our generation owe to generations yet unborn?" As Pope John Paul II has written, "there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and . . . The human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations."*

*Passing along the problem of global climate change to future generations as a result of our delay, indecision, or self-interest would be easy. But we simply cannot leave this problem for the children of tomorrow. As stewards of their heritage, we have an obligation to respect their dignity and to pass on their natural inheritance, so that their lives are protected and, if possible, made better than our own.*

In the rest of this column, I will share with you bits and pieces of the articles found in the *U.S. Catholic* edition on the Green issue:

#### **Paper Chase**

In the editorial page, Heidi Schlumpf writes:

*Journalists are notorious pack-rats, and we especially love to save paper. We save clippings of our own articles, notebooks from every interview we've ever done, and files upon files of the writings of others, too. I recently threw out a small dumpster's worth of paper—most of which will sadly end up in a landfill.*

*At home I dutifully haul paper, plastic, glass, and other items to our local recycling center. At work blue bins collect paper for recycling (though it's hard to be sure where it ends up). **Americans now recycle 300 pounds of paper per person each year—a step in the right***

**direction, since it takes 2 to 3.5 tons of trees to make 1 ton of paper.**

*But taking items to be recycled is just one part of the equation. We also should be using recycled things, including paper. Even though it costs a little more, I do try to opt for the paper towels or tissues made in part from recycled paper. But that is small potatoes compared to the amount of paper used to produce this magazine each month.*

*When the U.S. Catholic editors began planning this special issue on the environment many months ago, we immediately thought we'd like to print it on recycled paper. Our printer told us that they offer recycled paper made from 10 percent post-consumer waste. That means 90 percent of the paper is still either from virgin trees or from scraps from the production of other paper. And, unfortunately, most recycled paper also uses more cancer-causing bleaching chemicals than virgin stock. So even though in the end we decided to use the recycled paper, we had to realize that the decision was not as clear-cut as we had thought.*

*The complexity of many such environmental choices notwithstanding, we Catholics are called to care for the Earth because it is God's creation and because every living thing has inherent value.*

#### **Made in God's Image calls us to be Good Stewards of God's Creation.**

In an article on the Bible and the environment, Dianne Bergant, a Professor of the Old Testament writes:

God wills that the world "be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas. . . And the earth" (Gen 1:22). Our responsibility as God's images and partners in the covenant is to see that this is accomplished. Since the earth itself appears to possess an inner urgency that strains toward this goal, we don't have to induce it. What we must do is safe-guard it: "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (Gen. 2:15). As we today "subdue" and "have dominion," we must cherish the earth, nurture its fruitfulness, and foster its growth.

#### **Our Mother Earth's Keepers**

As images of God, we must walk through the world with understanding and trustworthiness. The earth is now in our keeping. We must take up this responsibility as agents of God. It is an awesome role that we play in the world. The psalms speak of the honor with which God has clothed us: "What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?" (Ps 8:5).

The earth is a storehouse of mineral and fossil treasure. Having discovered it, we are often captivated by its power and seek to find more and more. As responsible stewards we must limit our searching and testing lest we squander our treasure and lose it forever.

The earth vibrates with the pulsations of life' it works miracles of renewal within the secrets of its body. It feeds us with the outward signs of these miracles. Our insatiable appetites want more and more. As responsible stewards we must be considerate of the strains that maturation must bear and be patient with its timing. As images of God, we merely manage the earth in God's name.

We are only beginning to realize that being the image of God is a distinction that brings serious responsibilities. We are summoned to be signs of the sovereignty of God; we represent how and where God reigns supreme. In humble recognition of this, we must not attempt simply to control the earth but to live in accord with it and to care for it. As we do this, we manifest the tender compassion that our God has toward all creation.

### **Ireland and Plastic Bags**

In a piece called: *The New BYOB: Bring Your Own Bag*, Cathy O'Connell-Cahill writes:

*They blocked drainage systems in Bangladesh and were found to be largely responsible for major floods that left two thirds of the country underwater. Taiwan passed a law banning their free distribution in stores and restaurants. South Africans call them their "national flower".*

*They also once clung to trees and bushes all over the Irish countryside, but no more. If you want a plastic bag in Ireland to hold your new Irish sweater or your produce from the market, you'll have to pay a tax for the privilege: the equivalent of 33 U.S. cents. You'll also have to endure disapproving stares from passerby.*

*Ireland's 2002 tax on plastic bags, pushed through with the help of a determined environment minister, has changed not only behavior but attitudes as well. New York Times reporter Elizabeth Rosenthal quotes civil servant Cathal McKeown, 40, on plastic bags: "I used to get half a dozen with every shop. Now I'd never ever buy one. If I forgot these," said McKeown, pointing to the large cloth bags he carried, "I'd just take the cart of groceries and put them loose in the boot of the car, rather than buy a bag."*

***Within weeks of the tax taking effect, plastic bag use dropped 94 percent, reports Rosenthal*** "Plastic bags were not outlawed, but carrying them became socially unacceptable—a par with wearing a fur coat or not cleaning up after one's dog." *The Irish have overwhelmingly adopted reusable cloth bags as their favored means of carrying items home from the store. (The environment minister thwarted a shift to paper bags by threatening to tax them as well; paper bags, while biodegradable, are even more environmentally damaging to manufacture.)*

*Revenue from Ireland's "plastax" is spent on environmentally friendly initiatives and cleanup projects.*

*San Francisco, alone among major U.S. cities, has banned plastic bags. Taxing proposals similar to Ireland's have failed in many countries and in other U.S. cities after an outcry by merchants and bag manufacturers.*

*But the environmentally inclined don't give up. Miami city commissioner Marc Sarnoff, who has proposed a number of green regulations in Miami including a ban on plastic bags, bought 3,000 canvas bags for his constituents last year. He also gave each of his fellow commissioners a cloth bag bearing the words, "I'm not a plastic bag."*

**If everyone in South Florida stopped using plastic bags, he said, "We would save 700,000 gallons of gasoline a year," reports Miami Today. "It's time that we walked the walk a little bit."**

### **And the Survey says . . . . .**

A survey taken from *U.S. Catholic* readers states:

*Reducing global warming is a moral imperative for Catholics.*

Agree 76% - Disagree 11% - Other 13%

*Global warming can only be solved through government intervention, not individual action.*

Agree 9% - Disagree 74% - Other 17%

*I feel that I am doing a half-hearted job of caring for the environment.*

Agree 54% - Disagree 40% - Other 6%

*The Catholic Church has taken a strong enough lead in encouraging people to care for the earth.*

Agree 16% - Disagree 73% - Other 11%

### **Ten Ways Parishes Can Save the Earth**

1. Conduct an energy audit of your parish's buildings. To arrange one, contact your local Interfaith Power and Light group (the [regenerationproject.org](http://regenerationproject.org)), or your utility company, or find guidelines for a do-it-yourself audit at [energystar.gov/congregations](http://energystar.gov/congregations).
2. Form an eco-spirituality team to study environmental issues, help educate other parishioners, and create an action plan.
3. Ask your pastor to talk about care for creation and climate change in his homilies. (Or address the issue in his Pastor's Column.)
4. Ask youth groups and school kids to conserve energy by recycling their homework papers, taking shorter showers and so on.
5. Research local experts (activists, farmers, meteorologist, scientists) who can speak about environmental issues specific to your geographic area. Join with other faith communities to sponsor a speaker series.

6. Provide outdoor spiritual opportunities—retreats, days of reflection, prayer services—to nurture spiritual connections with creation.

7. Team up with local farmers and invite growers to sell their wares after weekend Masses, or offer your parish as a drop-off/pickup location for a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program. Learn more at [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org).

8. Feature simple energy-saving tips in your bulletin. Find ideas at [nativenergy.com](http://nativenergy.com) and click on “more you can do.”

9. Getting ready to renovate? Explore how you can dispose of building materials in environmentally responsible ways. Build with recycled materials whenever possible and purchase Energy Star appliances for parish buildings.

10. Take time during Mass to pray for the poor and vulnerable, especially those in developing nations, who suffer disproportionately from the effects of global warming.

**Those of you who are sensitive to the Green issue and are active in the parish can, I assume, tell us how we can do a much better job in this area. I would like to hear from you.**

### 10 ways Catholic families can save the earth

1. Buy different napkin rings (at the secondhand store, of course) for everyone in the family and use cloth napkins.
2. Use cloth grocery bags.
3. Walk or bike instead of drive whenever possible. (It’s more often than you think.)
4. Buy organic food, especially milk, if you can afford it.
5. Eat less meat and more fresh fruits, vegetables, and grains. A recent U.N. report concluded that the livestock industry is responsible for more green-house gas emissions than all forms of transportation added together. Eliminating or reducing meat consumption is one of the most positive changes we can make for the environment.
6. Compost your garbage.
7. Use a rain barrel to collect water for your garden.
8. Reduce your use of small plastic storage bags (and reuse the ones you do). Use reusable storage containers instead.
9. Just try buying secondhand clothes.
10. Read books and magazines devoted to sustainable living for inspiration, motivation, and encouragement.

### Six Websites to help Catholics save the earth

1. Find out what Catholics are doing: [catholicsandclimatechange.org](http://catholicsandclimatechange.org).
2. Read the U.S. bishops’ statement on climate change: Global Climate change: *A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence,*

*and the Common Good* at [usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml](http://usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml).

3. See what the church is telling the state through letters, testimony and action alerts: [usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/lettersalerts.shtml](http://usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/lettersalerts.shtml).

4. Take action by joining your diocesan or state Catholic conference legislative network. Find state conferences at [nasccd.org](http://nasccd.org) and diocesan conferences at [nplc.org/roundtable/members.asp](http://nplc.org/roundtable/members.asp).

5. Know the presidential candidates’ positions: [politico.com/candidates/viewcandidatesGlobalWarming.html](http://politico.com/candidates/viewcandidatesGlobalWarming.html) or [grist.org/candidate-chart-08.html](http://grist.org/candidate-chart-08.html)

6. Learn about public policy on climate change: [pewclimate.org/global-warming-basics/climate-change-101](http://pewclimate.org/global-warming-basics/climate-change-101)

### GREEN PARISHES

Parishes mentioned in one of the articles: *St. Elizabeth Parish*, is a 230 household parish in a working-class suburb of Detroit. The Pastor says that his parish has reduced its peak energy demand by 60% over five years. It has saved \$20,000 per year following several energy-efficient upgrades to the parish and school buildings. Conservation efforts included installing a wind turbine and 12 solar panels on the rectory, adding weather stripping around doors to block the wind, and installing extra window panels inside the church’s stained glass. (Is this really possible? If so, what do we need to do to make it happen here?)

*St. Joan of Arc Parish in Minneapolis* have formed an eco-spirituality team to study a variety of environmental issues and educate the parish on water, food supply and global warming.

Some of the parish’s more successful efforts thus far have included producing a 20-minute DVD called *Stewards of the Earth*, which includes short snippets of speakers from a local diocesan environmental conference.

By stepping up efforts to recycle and compost materials used for parish events (such as paper plates), *St. Joan of Arc* is also working toward making large-scale events “zero waste,” with the eventual goal of becoming a zero-waste facility.

In addition the parish is the leading Minnesota congregation participating in a nonprofit-sponsored “Minnesota Energy Challenge,” which helps individuals and businesses calculate their carbon footprint and learn how to save energy. To date the 400 parishioners who have signed up have saved more than \$200,000 in energy costs and have kept more than 3 million pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

“We need to be aware and care,” says parishioner Dana White, a longtime member of the eco-spirituality team. “We can turn this around if we can gain enough awareness.”

The bishop's statement on Global change concludes with these words:

*Our national debate over solutions to global climate change needs to move beyond the uses and abuses of science, sixty-second ads, and exaggerated claims. Because this issue touches so many people, as well as the planet itself, all parties need to strive for a civil and constructive debate about U.S. decisions and leadership in this area.*

*As people of religious faith, we bishops believe that the atmosphere that supports life on earth is a God-given gift, one we must respect and protect. It unites us as one human family. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation. The values of our faith call us to humility, sacrifice, and a respect for life and the natural gifts God has provided. Pope John Paul II reminds us in his statement *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* that "respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God." In that spirit of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonders of creation, we Catholic bishops call for a civil dialogue and prudent and constructive action to protect God's precious gift of the earth's atmosphere with a sense of genuine solidarity and justice for all God's children.*

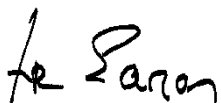
A final word from Jennie Lewis, a U.S. Catholic reader.

My faith teaches me that I am part, not above or beyond, the web of God's creation. To think otherwise is a serious error. I believe that all of God's creation—us, animals, plants, water, rock, the atmosphere—will be brought into the glory of the kingdom. Why would we trash what God wants to glorify?

I am hoping that some parishioners with a passion in this area can help our parishes and interested families to become better stewards of God's creation. If interested let me know.

***School Envelope Report for March.*** As you know, the monthly package of envelopes contains a special envelope for the school. March donations totaled \$8,535. These are challenging times for families who are trying to do all they can to keep their children in a Catholic school. Anything that we as a parish family can do to support families is very much appreciated. I am so grateful to all of you who give to this collection. May the Lord bless you for your generous stewardship

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Sean". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.