

ARE FOR ALL OF CREATION

Six Session Process
for Faith Communities



INTERCOMMUNITY PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

Introduction

The Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center offers **Care for All of Creation**, a six-session communal process, to communities of faith. While the gift of creation fills us with gratitude, awe and wonder, Pope John Paul II reminds us that we are called to respond to a people and a planet in peril.

Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past...The ecological crisis is a moral crisis.

—John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*

The purpose of the **Care for All of Creation** Booklet is to enable communities to gather for prayer and ritual; education, analysis and discussion of environmental and social issues; and action to create a sustainable Earth Community.

We hope that our **Care for All of Creation** process will build community, be a catalyst for conversion, and assist you in contributing to the common good.

If the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center can be a resource in any way, please contact us.

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Facilitator Guide

Leadership is an essential element of any gathering. Each session is designed to be led by a facilitator. This role can be rotated or shared. The facilitator will be responsible for the following:

Preparation

- ⌘ Read through the sessions and prepare for each; lead the sharing for the ritual
- ⌘ Set up the prayer table
- ⌘ Identify and invite readers before each session
- ⌘ Make sure participants have a booklet and the reading assignment before Session 1: *Radical Amazement* on p.29
- ⌘ Bring, or ask participants to be responsible for, refreshments for the break

Specific Preparation for Each Session

At the beginning of each session, welcome the group. Introductions should be made at the first session and again when new members join. Share the theme of the session.

1. Universe Story

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, candle, lighter, and a ribbon for each participant
- ⌘ *Awakening Universe* DVD available at IPJC. If you choose not to use the video, expand the discussion of *Radical Amazement*
- ⌘ Familiarize yourself with the Cosmic Walk exercise
- ⌘ Remind the group to read *The Comforting Whirlwind: God and the Environmental Crisis* on p. 33 for session two

2. Global Warming

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, candle, and a lighter
- ⌘ Remind the group to read *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* on p. 37, and to bring a small container of water that has special meaning for session three

3. Water

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, large bowl for water, and a hand towel
- ⌘ Remind the group to read *Mindful Living—Human Health, Pollution, and Toxics* on p. 41 for session four

4. Toxics

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, four votive candles, and a lighter
- ⌘ Remind the group to read *The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity* on p. 46 for session five

5. Social, Economic, Environmental

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, basket, plate with a loaf of bread, rice cakes, pita bread, tortilla, pitcher of water and a cup for each participant
- ⌘ Remind the group to read *Passion for God, Passion for the Earth* on p. 51 for session six

6. Greening Parishes

- ⌘ Cloth for prayer table, large bowl of water, hand towel, and a potted plant for each participant, or one per group

Small Group Guidelines

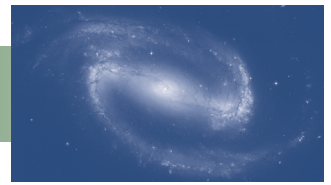
It is the responsibility of the facilitator to create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for sharing openly and honestly. Each session is comprised of prayer, group discussion, reflection, analysis and action. The facilitator should review the following guidelines with participants for the first two or three sessions:

- ⌘ Listen with respect and without interruption, judgment or counsel.
- ⌘ Each person is a potential voice of the Holy Spirit.
- ⌘ Speak for one self using “I” statements rather than “We” statements.
- ⌘ Be brief so that all participants have an opportunity to speak.
- ⌘ All sharing is to be kept confidential.

Size of Discussion Groups—Generally when a group is larger than 10, it is better to break into smaller groups for discussion.

Time—Respect people’s time by starting and ending each session on time. At the beginning of the session remind people that it is your role as facilitator to monitor the time for the benefit of the people and the process.

Universe Story: A Sacred Journey



Reading: *Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe*, Judy Cannato, p. 29

Theme

The new universe story, informed by the scientific discoveries of our day, invites us to expand the way we think about and respond to our God and to life around us.

Opening Prayer

(15 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth and a candle. Place a ribbon at each participant's place.

Reader: "We must not underestimate the significance of the way in which we tell the story of the cosmos. Human life is rooted in the practice of sharing the rich variety of our lives—telling stories... that reveal our highest hopes and deepest fears, stories that connect us to one another and cause us to care. It is in the sharing of stories that connections are strengthened..."
—*Radical Amazement*

Reflection

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on a time when you felt a deep connection with Earth. After the quiet I will begin sharing.

Ritual and Sharing

Leader: In a sentence or two share a time when you felt a deep connection with Earth. As you share, place your ribbon on the ritual table. If you wish you may place your ribbon in silence. Our ribbons will form a web of our stories.

The Awakening Universe

(15 minutes)

Leader: As we each have stories so our universe has a story. The scientific discoveries of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are changing the way we tell the story of the universe. *The Awakening Universe* introduces us to that new story.

Large Group Discussion

(20 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on what we have just seen and the following questions. Then we'll have a discussion.

- ∞ What is my initial response to *The Awakening Universe*? What amazes me? What challenges me?
- ∞ How does the knowledge that all of creation was birthed from the same source affect my story?
- ∞ How does knowing that *we are made of star dust*, affect my attitude toward the natural world?
- ∞ What is my response to the question, "What spell have we fallen under that we would destroy the very systems upon which we depend for life?"

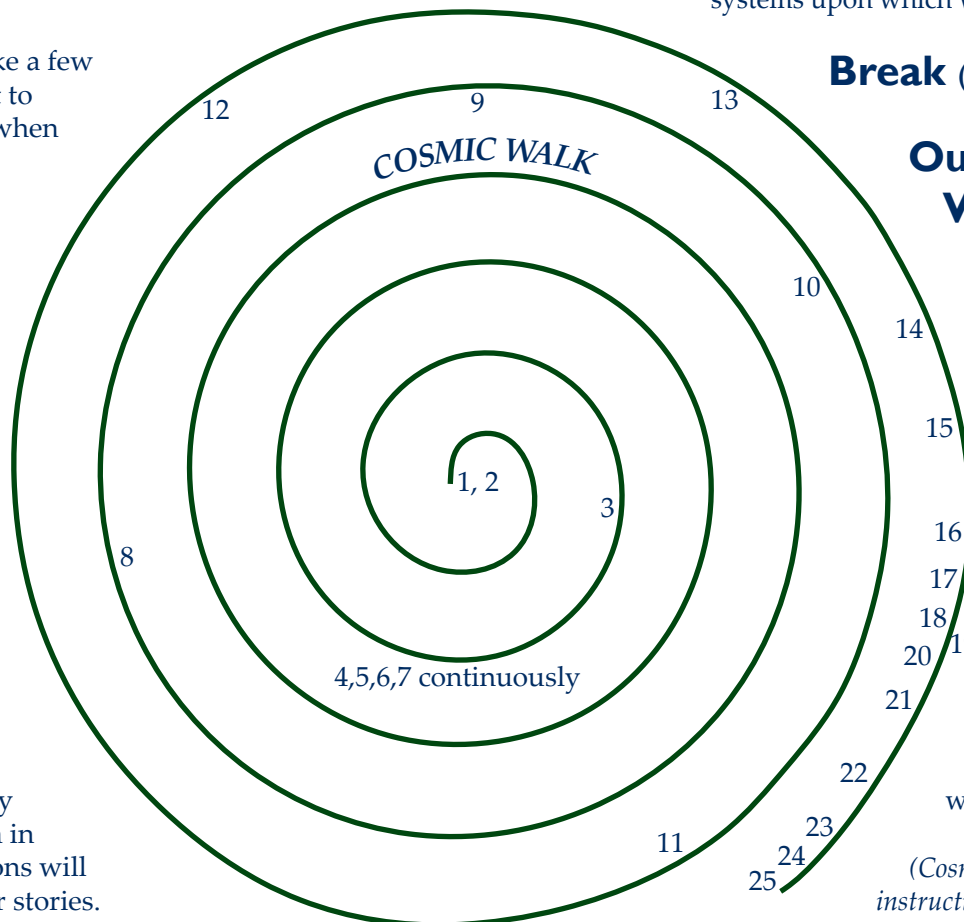
Break (15 minutes)

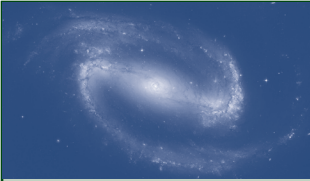
Our Story: The Whole of Our Family Tree!

(5 minutes)

Leader: The story of the universe is our story. Let's follow the journey of the universe into existence, pausing at each step to be filled with awe and wonder, and to marvel at the profound wisdom at work.¹

(Cosmic Walk leader instructions on the next page)





Leader: With your finger, trace the **COSMIC WALK** sketched on page 5. This is indeed our story, showing us how connected we

are to every other being in the universe. What is our human role? How do we live in a mutually enhancing relationship with the rest of creation? How have the last 2000 years increased the challenge? *(used with permission)*

1. "In the beginning..."
2. Elementary particles formed (within the first second)
3. Stars form (1 billion years)
4. Stars burn hydrogen and helium (continuously)
5. Red Giants form (continuously)
6. White Dwarfs form (continuously)
7. Supernova: Mothers of the Universe (continuously)
8. Our mother star goes Supernova (6 billion years ago)
9. Our sun formed (5 billion years ago)
10. Earth forms (4.6 billion years ago)
11. Life begins on Earth (4 billion years ago)
12. Oxygen produced by plants (2 billion years ago)
13. Multicellular Species (1.3 billion years ago)
14. Microscopic creatures start eating each other (800 million years ago)
15. Worms appear (670 millions years ago)
16. Fish appear (500 million years ago)
17. First life on land (425 million years ago)
18. Amphibians appear (370 million years ago)
19. Insects appear (360 million years ago)
20. Reptiles, Dinosaurs, birds appear (313 million years ago)
21. Mammals appear (216 million years ago)
22. Flowers appear (114 millions years ago)
23. Human ancestors left forest for savanna (14 million years ago)
24. Oldest known remains of modern human beings (300,000 years ago)
25. Rise of great civilizations (2000-4000 years ago)

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on the journey we have just taken and the following questions: *(5 minutes)*

1. How does the journey of the universe provide a new perspective for me?
2. How does it feel to realize?
 - ☞ The universe poured rain on Earth for millions of years to form the oceans.
 - ☞ The water in my body contains primordial hydrogen formed in the first seconds of the Big Bang.
 - ☞ Jelly fish and worms are my ancestors.
 - ☞ Humans could not exist on Earth if not for the

"The universe is the primary revelation of the divine, the primary scripture, the primary purpose of divine-human communion."
—Thomas Berry

oxygen that plant life provides, but plant life has and can exist without human life on Earth.

- ☞ Earth is in the midst of the biggest mass extinction since the dinosaurs perished 65 million years ago and we are the major cause.
- 3. What other insights do I have?

Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Leader: Let's break into small groups and share on this question:

What amazes me the most from the cosmic journey experience?

Integrating the New Story with Faith (15 minutes)

"The new narrative of the unfolding of the universe does not contradict our Christian story...Our faith

tradition has always maintained that there was a beginning... We believe not only that God initiated the creation event, but that the divine presence flows in and through the experience of ongoing creation."

—*Radical Amazement*

"As the new universe story seeps into our awareness, it challenges us to expand the way we think about and respond to the life around us. As clearly as the parables told by Jesus challenged his listeners to ask questions about who they were and what their relationships meant, so the new universe story challenges us."

—*Radical Amazement*

Uni-verse—one song

"All serious solutions to the ecological crisis demand that human beings change our thinking, relationships and behaviors in order to recognize the interconnectedness of all creation."

—*"Christian Ecological Imperative," Canadian Bishops, 2003*

Large Group Discussion

- ⌘ Are there beliefs that I've lived out of my entire life that the new universe story is inviting me to reconsider?
- ⌘ How can this new universe story which shows the interconnectedness of all of creation enable us to respond to the ecological crisis that we face?

Threatened by Extinction

- 12% of all species of birds
- 24% of all species of mammals
- 30% of all species of fish

Action: Living The New Story

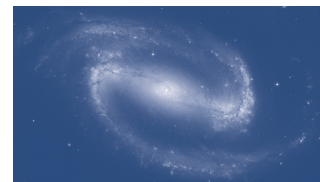
(10 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet before brainstorming to reflect on ways in which I will personally or communally incorporate the new universe story into my life and relationships with family, faith community and co-workers.

Large Group Brainstorm Ideas for Action

- ⌘ Form a book discussion group on *Radical Amazement*, or *Quest for the Living God*.
- ⌘ Organize a viewing and discussion of *The Awakening Universe*.

- ⌘ Take time each day for meditation or centering prayer.
- ⌘ Read favorite Scripture passages with the lens of the new universe story.
- ⌘ Other?



Closing Prayer

(10 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on the actions that we have just talked about. Is there one that you would consider taking?

(pause)

Leader: I invite anyone who wishes to share the action that she or he is considering. As you share come up to the ritual table and take your ribbon as a reminder of your commitment. You may choose to take your ribbon in silence.



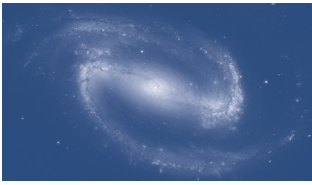
Olivia Zapata

Litany of Amazement

Reader: Lovingly crafting, laughing and laboring, Mother Earth evolved:

- 5,000 species of bacteria
- 10,000 species of fungi
- 65,000 species of protozoa, algae and mold
- 350,000 species of plants
- 1.5 million species of animals

All: May we live with radical amazement!



Reader: The sun generously sustains us during the day. The brilliance of the Milky Way delights us at night.

All: *May we live with radical amazement!*

Reader: Every part of this earth is sacred, every blade of life-giving grass, every majestic mountain peak, every creature that inhabits the forest.

All: *May we live with radical amazement!*

Reader: What if our existence is more significant than the things we buy? What if we truly belong here because the Universe has labored for 13 billion years to bring us into being?

All: *May we live with radical amazement!*

Reader: The astronomer or hobbyist looking through a telescope is literally the Universe looking at itself. The child entranced by the immensity of the ocean is Earth enraptured by itself. The student learning biology is the planet learning in consciousness, with awareness, how it functioned instinctively and unconsciously for billions of years. The worshipper singing praises is the Universe celebrating the wonder of the divine Mystery from whence it came, and in which it exists.

All: *May we live with radical amazement!*

Reader: What if the ultimate meaning of our brief lives is the way in which we enable the care that gave birth to us to extend out through human hands in the great work of building a vibrant, compassionate Earth community?

All: *May we live with radical amazement!*²



Signs of Hope

Communities of faith have been responding to the new universe story and its eco-justice challenge for more than 30 years. Hundreds of ecospirituality centers are located in the U.S. Many have been established by women religious, including:

∞ **EarthLinks:** Formed by the Dominican Sisters of Hope in Denver in 1996. Mission: to connect low-income people with the natural world for the mutual benefit of people and the planet.

—www.earthlinks-colorado.org

∞ **Santuario Sisterfarm:** Founded by Dominican Sisters of Adrian and Latinas of the Borderlands in 2002 in Texas. Mission: to be a carbon-neutral ecospirituality center dedicated to cultivating diversity and living in right relationship with the whole Earth Community.

—www.sisterfarm.org

Interfaith partnerships are on the rise. In 1993 **The National Religious Partnership for the Environment** was formed to educate and motivate a deeper reverence and respect for God’s creation. Accomplishments include:

∞ **Interfaith Global Climate Change Campaigns:** established in 20 states; and a Network has recruited 25,000 individuals as advocates for national climate policy.

∞ **Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good:** pastoral statement published by the US Catholic Bishops.

∞ **Endangered Species Act:** Evangelical Christians were widely credited for having helped prevent rollback of this legislation.

∞ **Preventing Deforestation:** Jewish community has enacted a two-year campaign to address this issue.

∞ **Open Letter to Automobile Executives:** delivered by a delegation of Christian and Jewish leaders which resulted in substantive discussions on fuel economy.

—www.nrpe.org

“God touches all in the heavens and on earth; everything is full of sacred presence.”

—*Psalm 103:19*

Global Warming: Future of God's Creation



Reading: *The Comforting Whirlwind: God and the Environmental Crisis*, Bill McKibben, p. 33

Theme

The interconnectedness of all of creation calls us to respond to global warming by acting in ways that reverse climate change and its impacts on the entire Earth Community.

Opening Prayer

(20 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth and a candle.

Group 1:

Then God answered Job out of the whirlwind:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me if you understand.

Group 2:

Who marked off its dimensions?

Surely you know.

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Group 1:

Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?

What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed?

Or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?

Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain and a path for the thunderstorm?

Group 2:

Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season?

Or can you guide the bear with its children?

Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars and spreads its wings toward the south?

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high?

Do you know the laws of the heavens?

Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?

All:

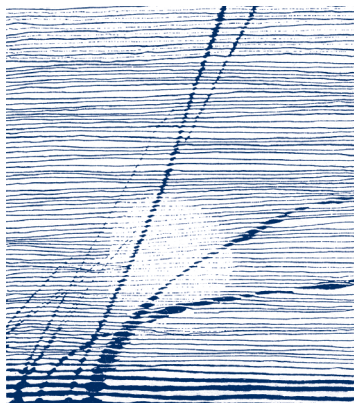
Then Job answered God:

I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.

—Job 38-39, 42



Reflection

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on what in nature is awe inspiring for you, too wonderful to comprehend? After the quiet I will begin the sharing.

Sharing

Leader: In a sentence or two, share what in nature is awe inspiring for you, too wonderful to comprehend.

Large Group Discussion

(25 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on Bill McKibben's sermon and the following questions.

"To call it a problem is to understate what it really is: it is a crime. A crime against the poorest and most marginalized people on this planet."

"All social justice issues have ecological implications... The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are one."
—Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops

"It's a crime against the rest of creation ... against the lion and the antelope and the vulture and you can just go on down the list."

"It's a crime against the future, against everyone who is going to come after us."



“As long as we consider ourselves to be enviably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change.”

(IPCC) 2007: Synthesis Report (see table on p. 11); and to reflect on the following questions. After the quiet you will have 15 minutes to share your responses to the questions with one other person, listening carefully to your partner’s responses without judgment.

- ⌘ Do you agree with McKibben’s assessment of global warming? Why or why not?
- ⌘ What questions or uncertainties do you have about climate change?
- ⌘ Catholic Social Teaching equates environmental pollution to disrespect for life. Why is global warming a moral issue?
- ⌘ How does global warming relate to your faith or spirituality?
- ⌘ For you, what is Job’s message for our world today in the context of global warming?

“...Global climate change is...about the future of God’s creation and the one human family.”

—*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good, USCCB, 2001*

- ⌘ What does prudence mean to you in relation to global warming?
- ⌘ How have you considered the impact of global warming on people who are poor and vulnerable?
- ⌘ How do you act for the common good in your response to climate change?

Break (15 minutes)

Integrating Our Faith

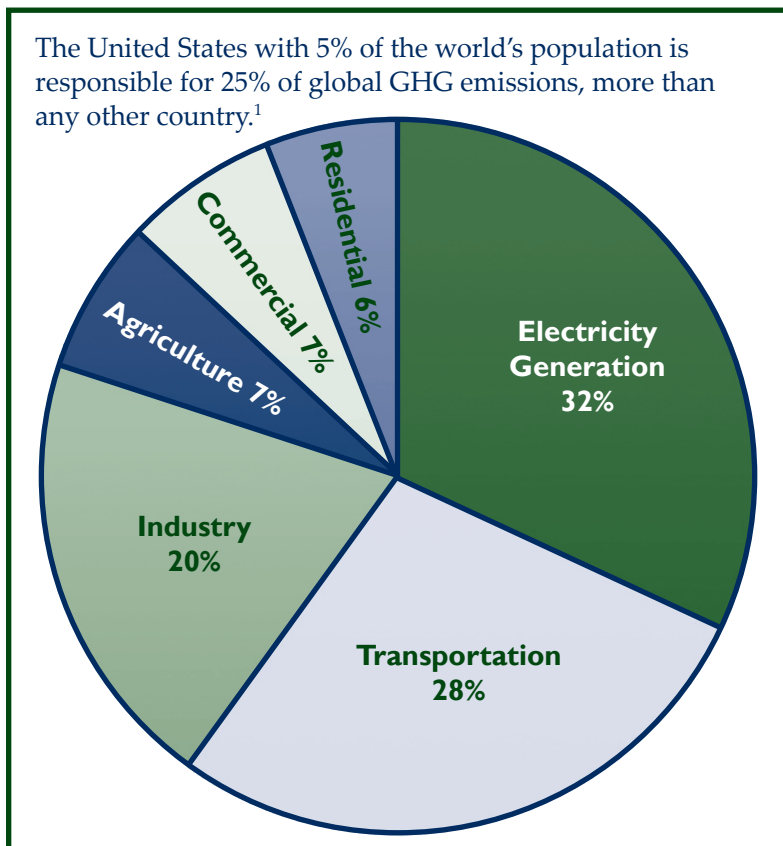
(25 minutes)

Leader: Take five minutes to read over and compare The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change principles and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Large Group Sharing

(5 minutes)

Leader: We invite those who would like to share one highlight from their conversations to do so briefly.



Action: Signs of Hope

(20 minutes)

Willing to Change

- ⌘ In a 2007 survey in 21 countries, 79% agreed that human activity is a significant cause of climate change.
- ⌘ 9 out of 10 people said action was necessary with 2/3rds of people saying, “it is necessary to take major steps starting very soon.”²
- ⌘ Transition Towns, began in the United Kingdom by a teacher and his students, emphasize alternatives to an oil dependent lifestyle including, community gardens, transportation, housing and planting carbon-consuming trees. There are 26 member communities in the UK, and 400 worldwide interested in becoming transitional communities.³

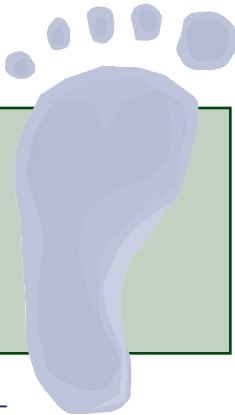
Leader: Let’s take a few moments of quiet before brainstorming to reflect on ways in which individuals and communities can act to stop global warming.

<p>The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change embraces the following three principles:</p>	<p>IPCC Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report</p> 
<p>Prudence A thoughtful, deliberate, and reasoned basis for taking action to achieve a moral good.</p> <p>The Coalition accepts overwhelming scientific consensus about climate change. As stewards of all creation, we must identify wise, careful actions that will reverse this climate change and avoid its potentially dangerous impact on all life.</p>	<p>The Context Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level.</p> <p>Global GHG emissions due to human activities have grown since pre-industrial times, with an increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004.</p>
<p>Poverty Any successful strategy must also reflect the genuine participation and concerns of those most affected and least able to bear the burdens.</p> <p>The Coalition seeks to find constructive ways to approach climate change from the bottom up. We strive to bring the voice of the poor to the public debate about climate change and ensure that resources are available to the most vulnerable.</p>	<p>What's at Stake Approximately 20 to 30% of plant and animal species assessed so far are <i>likely</i> to be at increased risk of extinction if increases in global average temperature exceed 1.5 to 2.5°C.</p> <p>By the 2080s, many millions more people than today are projected to experience floods every year due to sea level rise. The numbers affected will be largest in the densely populated and low-lying megadeltas of Asia and Africa while small islands are especially vulnerable.</p> <p>By 2020, between 75 and 250 million people are projected to be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change (poor communities in high risk areas are most vulnerable).</p>
<p>The Common Good Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet.</p> <p>As a wealthy nation and as the top contributor to greenhouse gases, we in the United States must help to shape responses that serve not only our own interests but those of the entire earth community.</p>	<p>Making a Difference Societies can respond to climate change by adapting to its impacts and by reducing GHG emissions (mitigation), thereby reducing the rate and magnitude of change. Even societies with high adaptive capacity remain vulnerable to climate change, variability and extremes. For example, a heat wave in 2003 caused high levels of mortality in European cities (especially among the elderly), and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 caused large human and financial costs in the United States.</p> <p>The capacity to adapt is dynamic and is influenced by a society's productive base, including natural and human-made capital assets, social networks and entitlements, human capital and institutions, governance, national income, health and technology. It is also affected by multiple climate and non-climate stresses, as well as development policy.</p>



Large Group Brainstorm Ideas for Action

- Use the Eco-Calendar, p.56
- Measure, reduce and offset your carbon footprint



Carbon Footprint: the impact human activities have on the environment in terms of the amount of greenhouse gases produced, measured in CO₂ units.

—www.carbonfootprint.com

- Research and invest in carbon-free and renewable energy
- Learn how climate change impacts low-lying island nations and at risk populations during heat waves, floods and famines
- Advocate for climate change legislation at international, federal and state levels
- Other?

Closing Prayer

(15 minutes)

Leader: As we begin our prayer, let's take a few moments of silence to reflect on one way in which we will respond to the issue of climate change in the coming week.

Reader: We are now faced with the fact my friends, that tomorrow is today.

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.

Buildings consume up to 76% of the total US electricity and emit 43% of our greenhouse gasses.

—*Plenty: The World in Green, Aug/Sept 2008*

Procrastination is still the thief of time.

Now we must move past indecision to action.

Now let us begin.

Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter —but beautiful struggle for a new world.

This is the calling of the children of God, and our brothers and sisters wait eagerly for our response.

Shall we say that the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?



Or will there be another message of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to the cause, whatever the cost?

The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we must choose in this crucial moment in human history.

All: With the help of God, the wisdom of my church and the friendship of others, I pledge to Earth and every living thing, my friendship. I pledge to be a seeker of justice for Earth in the following way this week.

Leader: Share briefly one way in which you will address the issue of climate change.

All: May the blessing of our loving and mystifying God descend upon us and remain with us always. May God's grace help us heal our world. Amen!

—*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Earth Community: a term from the Earth Charter, a declaration of universal responsibility to and for one another and the Living Earth Principles:

- respect and care for the community of life
- ecological integrity
- social and economic justice
- democracy, nonviolence, and peace

—www.earthcharter.org

Water: Gift of Life



Reading: *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*, Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, p. 37

Theme

Earth's life-giving water belongs to all of creation. It is our responsibility to care for water and to ensure that clean water is accessible for all of life on this planet.

Opening Prayer

(20 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth, large bowl and hand towel. Participants bring a small container of water.

Meditation: The Gift of Water

Leader: Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Become conscious of the saliva in your mouth, the moisture on the palms of your hands, the wetness of your tears. Our bodies are mostly water. Once, each of us floated around as embryonic selves in the sea of our mother's womb, our lungs filled with the fluid. Water moves in and out of each one of our cells every moment of every day. The water we drink unites us with the sacred Earth as intimately as the air we breathe.

The water around us and the water in us are united in a wondrous continual cycle: evaporated from the oceans



by the sun, condensing as clouds, and returning through rivers to the sea, passing on the way through countless animals, plants, and our own bodies. The natural cycle processes a regular trickle that is available for human life. It is transferred from ocean to sky and back to the land.

That trickle allowed life on land to evolve, and allows human life to survive. Each of us contributes to this trickle about a liter a day just through our breath and sweat.¹

Reflection

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on the water that you have brought with you, and its source and special meaning for you.

Ritual and Sharing

Leader: I invite you to pour your water into our communal bowl and to share a brief sentence or two on the source of your water and its special meaning. If you wish you may pour your water in silence. I will begin the sharing.

Leader: Let's all join in our closing prayer.

All: Our God is bringing us into a good land,

a land of flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,

a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees, and pomegranates,

a land of olive trees and honey,

a land where bread will not be scarce, where no one will be lacking,

a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills copper is mined.

All will eat and be satisfied.

Praise God, for the good land given to us. Amen!

—Deuteronomy 8:7-11

Large Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

Leader: What is your initial response to the reading, *Blue Gold*? What in the reading challenges you?

Leader: The reading suggests that as a society, we have become detached from the reality that our water sources are limited, and that "if we do not soon change our relationship to water and the ecosystems that sustain it, all our wealth and knowledge will be meaningless."

What do you know about the sources, accessibility and quality of your local water?

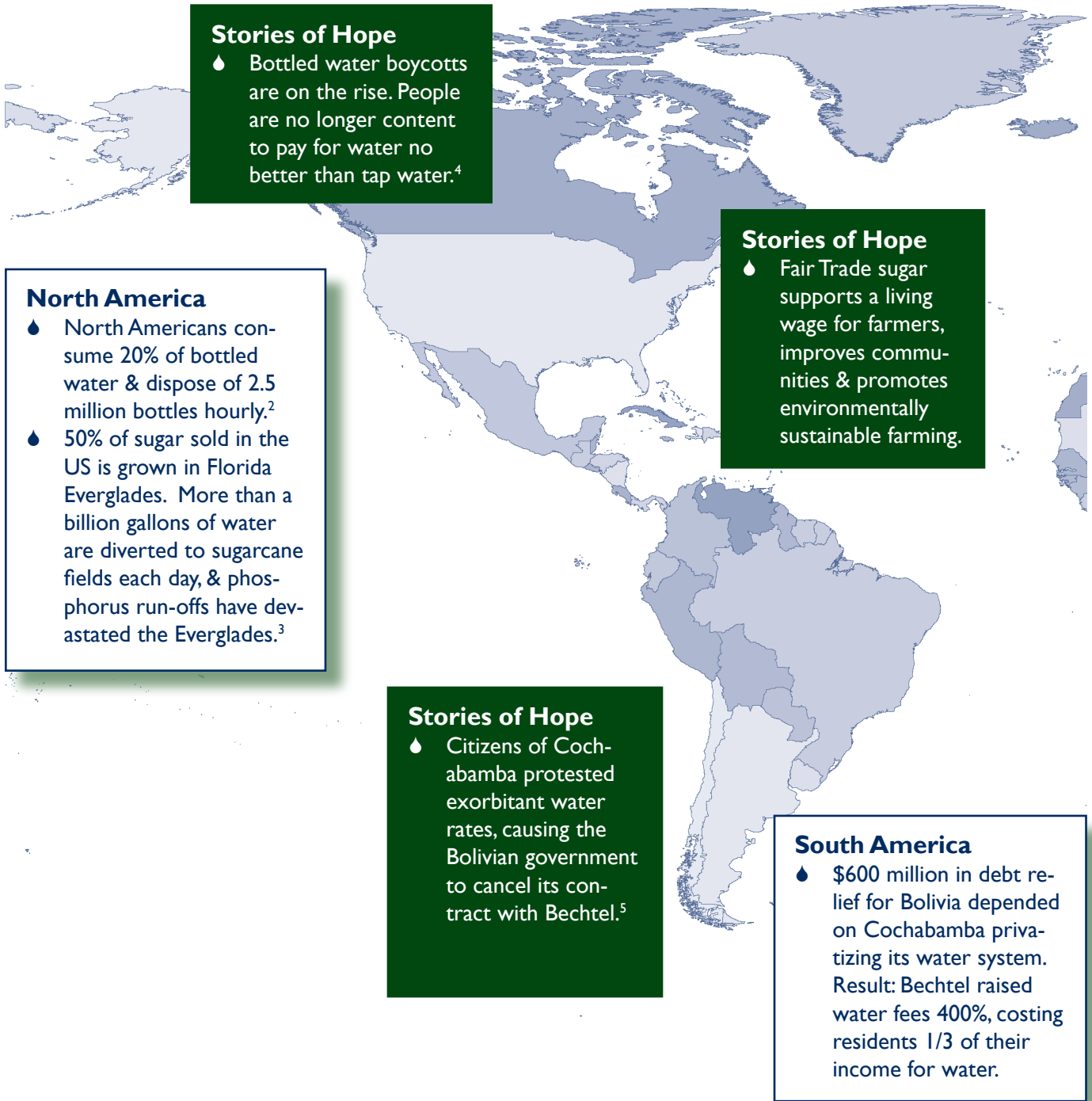


Analysis (30 minutes)

Leader: We'll take ten minutes to individually study the water issues map and the stories of hope.

Leader: Form a triad and take one issue from each continent to discuss and analyze.

How is the crisis an issue of consumption, poverty, industrial, agribusiness, privatization, and/or environmental degradation? (20 minutes)



70% of Earth is covered by water. Only 2.5% is accessible fresh water.

World Water Issues and Stories of Hope



Europe

- ◆ Since the Industrial Revolution, most of Europe's rivers have been polluted by sewage and industrial waste, destroying biodiversity.⁶

Stories of Hope

- ◆ The European Water Framework Directive of 2000 has contributed to lowering levels of pollutants and improvement in water quality.⁷

Asia

- ◆ Groundwater levels in Mehdiganj, India, dropped up to 26 feet during the first 7 years of Coca-Cola operations, creating a crisis for residents & farmers.⁸
- ◆ Aral Sea, once the 4th largest inland sea, could disappear by 2015 because of water diversion for cotton crops & poisoning by pesticides.⁹

Stories of Hope

- ◆ Religious shareholders are asking Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to adopt strategies to conserve water & assess the impact of their operations on communities & the environment.

Africa

- ◆ 1.1 billion, 18 % of world's population, lack access to safe drinking water. 2.6 billion, 42%, lack access to basic sanitation.¹⁰
- ◆ 85.7% of annual global deaths (over 1 million) from malaria occur in the Sahara.¹¹

Stories of Hope

- ◆ The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace raised funds to drill 2 wells in the Kenyan village of Siritanyi, where women spent hours each day in search of water that was usually contaminated.
- ◆ Children taught proper hygiene in primary school are transformed into health educators for their families, reducing household vulnerability to deadly diarrheal diseases by at least 40%.¹²

Large Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- ◆ What is something that surprised you?
Or, what is something that you have a different perspective on?
- ◆ How is water availability and use connected to other global issues, e.g., food production, health, global warming?



Break (15 minutes)

Reflection and Discussion: Catholic Social Teaching

(15 minutes)

Leader: Let's take quiet time to individually reflect on the following Catholic Social Teachings and Ideas for Action. (5 minutes)

Care for God's Creation

The Catholic tradition says that we show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation. This inspires a God-centered and sacramental view of the universe.

- ◆ Water belongs to Earth and to all species.
- ◆ People should accept responsibility to care for water and to understand the connection between the environment and the physical, cultural, and spiritual needs of people.
- ◆ Water must be conserved for all time. Decision making should be informed by the study of surface water ecosystems, groundwater resources, the impacts of climate change, and pollution prevention.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Each person is made in the image of God. This requires a consistent respect for human life and for all of creation.

- ◆ Access to water and sanitation are basic human rights.
- ◆ Science and technology should be applied to help assure water supplies that are clean, safe, and accessible for all people.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

We are one human family living on Earth. How we organize our society affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.

- ◆ Water resource management should be based on the perception of water as an integral part of the ecosystem, a natural resource, and a social and economic good.
- ◆ Water is a public trust, to be guarded by all levels of government. All parties affected by water management decisions should be involved in the decision-making process.

Ideas for Action

- ◆ Educate yourself about water issues in your area; partner with a local organization that protects aquatic ecosystems.

- ◆ Use a Water Use Calculator to calculate your water usage.
- ◆ Turn off the water while brushing your teeth and save 141 glasses of water.
- ◆ Advocate for water quality and conservation at international, federal, state and city levels.
- ◆ Educate yourself about global issues of access to water and sanitation. Partner with an organization that addresses these issues.
- ◆ Other?

“Local community members are often most knowledgeable about local ecosystem dynamics. Such citizens are best able... to initiate community-based and community-oriented ecologically sustainable economic development, and to suggest areas of individual and community sacrifices to conserve resources for the common good.”

—The Columbia Watershed,
Catholic Bishops of the Region, 2001

Discussion

Leader: Turn to the person next to you and share your ideas for action related to water. (10 minutes)

Closing Prayer

(15 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments to reflect on the precious gift of water and our responsibility to care for this resource and to insure that clean, safe and abundant water is accessible for all of creation. What is one action that I will take?

(pause)

Leader: Soften our hearts, God of living waters. Rain down your wisdom in sacred streams. As water flows over our hands, may we use them skillfully to preserve our precious planet.

Leader: I invite you to come to our bowl of water, place your hands in the water and share one action you will take on water. You may choose to place your hands in the water in silence.

Leader: Let's all join in our closing prayer.

All: Water flows from high in the mountains! Water runs deep in Earth! Miraculously, water comes to us and sustains all life! Amen!



Toxics: Cause for Caution



Reading: *Mindful Living—Human Health, Pollution, and Toxics*, Eco-Justice Programs, National Council of Churches, p. 41

Theme

We are called to work for a healthy environment for all of creation. Human activities which contaminate our water, air and land endanger the sustainability of life.

Opening Prayer

(10 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth and four candles.

Leader: In the beginning Earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.

A wind from God swept over the waters.

God lit the heavens with stars, moon and sun.

The light and dark,

Earth and sky,

the land and sea,

the plants and trees,

all the wild animals

and the fullness of humankind,

were all formed in love and declared good.

—Adapted, Genesis

Reader 1: Spirit of Life (*Light a candle*)

All: Come and feed us with your love and grace.

Reader 2: Spirit of Consolation
(*Light a candle*)

All: Come and embrace us with your presence and your vision.

Reader 3: Spirit of Hope
(*Light a candle*)

All: Come and fill us with a new story, a story that may free us to be your co-creators.

Reader 4: Spirit of the Universe
(*Light a candle*)

All: Come and inspire us with the sound of your calling. Amen!

Large Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

Leader: What is your initial response to the reading, *Mindful Living: Human Health, Pollution, and Toxics*? What in the reading challenges you?

Leader: In the reading we are reminded of our call to faithfulness.

“From the beginning of time, people have lived in an interdependent relationship with God’s Earth. [We are called] to work for the abundant and healthy environment that we all need and depend on for our existence.”

Where do you see signs of responsible care for all of creation? How do short term benefits contribute to long term damage?

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.”

—Clarissa Pinkola Estes



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Circle of Truth Activity

(25 minutes)

Leader: Let’s break into groups of three for the Circle of Truth activity. Assign the roles—Mattel Corporate Representative, Factory Worker and Neighbor of Toxic Waste Landfill—on p. 20. After each person has read her/his story aloud, use the following questions to initiate a conversation.



- ⌘ What responsibilities do manufacturers have in protecting human and environmental health?
- ⌘ What responsibilities do citizens/consumers have in protecting human and environmental health?

- ⌘ Who should be involved in waste management decision making?

Large Group Discussion

(5 minutes)

Leader: I invite each group to share a highlight from your conversation.

Break (15 minutes)

Integrating Our Faith

(10 minutes)

Leader: Let's take ten minutes to read and reflect on Cause for Caution, The Precautionary Principle, Catholic Social Teaching and Stories of Hope.

Cause for Caution

- ⌘ 80,000 chemicals are registered in the US and more than 2,000 new chemicals are introduced each year.¹
- ⌘ More than one-third of all personal care products contain at least one ingredient linked to cancer, and very few products are tested for safety.²
- ⌘ US industry releases over 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals a year.³
- ⌘ For every garbage can of waste you put on your curb, 70 garbage cans of waste are produced upstream.⁴



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“Race is still the most potent factor when predicting where toxic waste facilities are located, more important than income or other socio-economic factors.”

—Dr. Robert D. Bullard, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007*

- ⌘ Superfund sites are the nation's worst toxic sites. About 11 million people in the US, including 3-4 million children, live within one mile of a federal Superfund site.⁵

The Precautionary Principle

When an activity raises threats of harm to human health, or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. In this context, the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of the proof. The Precautionary Principle says that as an ethical matter, we should prevent all the harm we can. The Precautionary Principle says that if you've got safer alternatives, why not use them?⁶

Catholic Social Teaching

“We urge policy makers and public officials to focus more directly on the ethical dimensions of environmental policy and on its relation to development, to seek the common good, and to resist short-term pressures in order to meet our long-term responsibility to future generations... We need to use our voices and votes to shape a nation more committed to the universal common good and an ethic of environmental solidarity.”
—*Renewing the Earth, USCCB, 1992*

“As Catholics, we are called to care for God's gift of creation and to protect the most vulnerable among us. The poor suffer most directly from environmental decline and have the least access to relief from their suffering. While every child needs our concern, the option for the poor and vulnerable rooted in the Gospel and the Church's teaching compels us to protect especially poor children and their physical environment.”
—*The Catholic Coalition for Children and a Safe Environment*

Stories of Hope

- ⌘ Lawmakers in 29 states are considering bills that set stricter regulations for dangerous substances in consumer products. Five states, including Washington, have already passed legislation. California has banned phthalates, plastic softeners linked to endocrine disruption in cosmetics and toys. Minnesota has banned toxic mercury in cosmetics.
- ⌘ The green marketplace is booming in every sector, from nontoxic body care to organic food to green cleaners. Wal-Mart and Toys R Us have voluntarily imposed tighter standards for lead paint on children's toys and plan to restrict products with phthalates.

- ⌘ Before 2002, pressure-treated wood was treated with a pesticide that contained arsenic. After pressure from parents and consumer groups, the wood industry did a voluntary phase-out of residential wood treated with arsenic.
- ⌘ Residents are influencing community waste management decisions. In the South Bronx, Omar Freilla started the Green Worker Cooperatives to counter toxic dumping. His efforts led to reduced waste, the creation of “green collar” jobs, and natural resource preservation.
- ⌘ Grassroots organizing in Seattle led to the 2007 decision to adopt a city zero waste policy rather than adding another waste station.
- ⌘ Over 130 health care facilities in the US have signed The Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge: “We recognize that for the consumers who eat it, the workers who produce it and the ecosystems that sustain us, healthy food must be defined not only by nutritional quality, but equally by a food system that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human dignity and justice.”

“Comprehensive compassion and care could become the organizing healing principle of a flourishing Earth Community.”
—Brian Swimme

Large Group Discussion

(20 minutes)

Leader: What connections do I see between what I’ve just read, Cause for Caution, The Precautionary Principle, Catholic Social Teaching and Stories of Hope? What are my personal, communal concerns and signs of hope on the issue of toxics in our environment?

Action (10 minutes)

Leader: Let’s take a few moments of quiet to reflect on an action I will take this week to address the issue of toxics.

- ⌘ Research and buy safe products—body, lawn, household and toys.
- ⌘ Get involved in an organization working on toxics and the environment.
- ⌘ Map your community in terms of known or potential hazards at www.scorecard.org. Why are superfund sites in some communities and not in others?
- ⌘ Other?



Shoreline is the first community college in the Puget Sound region to provide credit degree training for Green Jobs as well as a degree in Zero Energy Technology.

Leader: I invite anyone who would like to share an action she/he will take to do so.



Closing Prayer

(10 minutes)

Reader: Jesus, you taught your disciples...**just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.**

For I was hungry and you gave me food.
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
I was naked and you gave me clothing.
I was sick and you took care of me.
I was in prison and you visited me.

Jesus, you ask us to treat our neighbors as we would want to be treated. We pray for all people who are suffering the effects of environmental toxins because their needs were not taken into account.

—Matthew 25

Leader: Let us bring the people and situations we are concerned about to our circle of prayer.

Reader: With your help, may we learn to preserve, conserve and share your bounty.

Teach us to revere your tender world, protecting the least among us from harm.

Help us to remember how our decisions today affect our earth and all of God’s creatures tomorrow.

In Your name we pray.

Amen!



Everyone Holds a Piece of the Truth

The Mattel Corporate Representative⁷

Since 1996 Mattel has gone further than any other company to be a good corporate citizen in establishing a corporate code of conduct. We have monitored the working conditions inside our own factories in China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Mexico, as well as our vendor factories. Audit protocols have been put in place including check lists for quantifying conditions such as having eyewash stations and safety showers installed in areas of corrosive material use. Each Mattel factory is audited on a three year rotational basis. We've done a lot of good and made the lives of our workers easier. It used to be that if a worker lived on the sixth floor of our dormitories, they would have to fill up a bucket of water on the ground floor and carry it up flights of stairs just to bathe. Now we have water available on the sixth floor. However, in light of recent discoveries of toxins in our products, we now realize that our mission has been too narrow and we've missed the bigger picture, which is the nature of the product. One of the challenges we face is that our suppliers have conflicting incentives. They want to reduce their costs because they have to keep prices low in order to hold onto their business.

The Factory Worker⁸

For nine years I worked in a cadmium battery plant in southern China, owned by one of the largest makers of nickel-cadmium batteries. I worked 12 hour days in production areas, inhaling cadmium dust. Initially I was tested for possible cadmium poisoning and the results showed no evidence of poisoning.

However, I developed symptoms including weakness, headaches, aging skin and sunken eyes. I was later diagnosed with chronic renal

failure that doctors say will shorten my life. Many of my co-workers have also been diagnosed with cadmium poisoning. Hundreds of workers went on strike when the company initially did not respond to our needs. Later the company paid out more than \$1 million in compensation and medical care. The company no longer makes nickel-cadmium batteries at their plants and now outsources that production to independent factories.



Neighbor of Hazardous Waste Landfill⁹

In 1968 city officials chose to host its main sanitary landfill in my community. Since then a construction and demolition landfill, a garbage transfer station and a recycling center have all become my neighbors. In a county that's less than five percent African American, every permitted solid waste facility is located on one little road that's predominately black. In 2002, when members of my family, neighbors and I were diagnosed with various cancers, I began an investigation. I learned that the landfills had been leaching trichloroethylene (TCE), a highly toxic carcinogen linked to liver, kidney and heart disease, diabetes, gastrointestinal disorders and birth defects. Today I'm involved in a lawsuit seeking reparations from state and local agencies, but so far no one has stepped forward to help us. The Natural Resources Defense Council has given those responsible 90 days to clean up the landfill.

Social, Economic, Environmental: One Earth Community



Reading: *The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity*,
Walter Brueggemann, p. 46

Theme

The interconnectedness of all of creation challenges us to recognize the interdependence between the social, economic and environmental consequences of our actions.

Opening Prayer

(15 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth, basket, plate with a loaf of bread, rice cakes, pita bread, tortillas and a pitcher of water. Share the breads during the break.

Reader: *It Is Possible* By Joyce Rupp
(used with permission)

It is possible
to become so one
with Earth
that every flower
perfumes the soul,

every snowflake
sends icy softness
dancing through veins,

every drop of rain
trickles down vessels
of the heart,

every cloud in the sky
sails along
songlines of the spirit,

every earthquake
rumbles in the gut,

every tide of the sea
moves in and out of self.

it is possible
to become one
with Earth

just as it is possible
to become one
with all people,
their pain, my pain,
their joy, my joy,
their struggle and delight



an echo of my own.

it is possible to become one.

It is possible.

—Joyce Rupp

Reflection

Leader: It is possible to become one with all people. Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on a time when you experienced being one with all people.

“Tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe.”

—John Muir

Ritual and Sharing

Leader: I invite you to briefly share a time when you experienced being one with all people. As you share, come to our ritual table and break off a piece of one of our breads and place it in the basket. If you wish you may do this in silence.

Small Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

Leader: What is your initial response to the reading, *The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity*? What in the reading challenges you?

Leader: In the reading Brueggemann traces the development of the scriptural themes of abundance and scarcity. Beginning with the Genesis story of God's gracious gift of creation, to the times of famine and scarcity during Pharaoh's rule, and ending with the Exodus story of God's gracious gift of manna in the desert.

☞ How does an attitude of abundance and scarcity play out in my own life?

Leader: “In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” Moses said to them, “It is the bread that our God has given you to eat. This is what God has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as



each of you needs.' The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. Those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed."

—Exodus 16:13-18

- ⌘ How can our amazement at God's gift of abundance move us toward more equitable relationships, socially, economically and environmentally?

Large Group Discussion

(5 minutes)

Leader: We invite those who would like to share a highlight from their conversations to do so briefly.

The Life Cycle of Beef¹

Deforestation/Grassland Destruction

The increasing international demand for beef has impacted the Amazon rainforests. Brazil has become the world's largest exporter of beef. The explosion of ranching in the Amazon has resulted in an increase in deforestation. It has been reported that the number of cattle in the Amazon region reached 74 million in 2007, out numbering people more than three to one.



Water Consumption/Pollution

It has been estimated that it takes more than 1,000 gallons of fresh water to produce one-quarter-pound cheeseburger, from growing the feed grain, to the water for cattle and their processing. Two percent of livestock farms now raise 40 percent of all animals in the United States. The government calls these facilities, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) and they are typically run by major corporations. These consolidated operations are able to produce food in high volume, for instance, a large CAFO would include 1000 cattle. Typically a liquid manure system is used, which mixes urine and feces with water and is held either under the facility or outside in large open air lagoons. These lagoons emit greenhouse gases into the air and contaminate ground water. Factory farming has expanded worldwide.

Energy Consumption

Producing beef in the global economy consumes a huge amount of fossil fuels to run farm equipment, to transport grain and cattle, and slaughtered beef, as well as refrigeration and cooking. More than 70 percent of the grain produced in the United States is fed to livestock.

Animal Welfare

Cows are typically confined indoors with minimal room for movement. Sometimes the tails are cut off. Doses of antibiotics are administered to the animals to prevent disease. They are also fed hormones to promote faster growth.

Health Hazards

Those who cannot afford organic beef alternatives, ingest the residual additives. When animals are slaughtered and processed the meat is cut up and packaged. There is risk of high levels of bacteria such as E. coli as well as safety risks to workers who use hazardous machinery.

Questions

- ⌘ In the case of beef, who wins and how? Economically, socially and environmentally?
- ⌘ Who loses and how? Economically, socially and environmentally?

Analysis (25 minutes)

Leader: Let's take five minutes to consider an example that illustrates the interconnectedness of the social, economic and environmental aspects of an issue. Read the Life Cycle of Beef and reflect on the questions that follow.

On August 27, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI called for a commitment to care for creation. He said creation is “exposed to serious risks by life choices and lifestyles that can degrade it. In particular, he said, “environmental degradation makes the lives of the poor especially unbearable.”

—www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/index.shtml

Small Group Discussion

Leader: Let's take 20 minutes to share our analysis in small groups.

Break (15 minutes)

Large Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

- ⌘ How are the themes of abundance and scarcity operative in the Life Cycle of Beef?
- ⌘ How did my/our analysis help me understand the interconnectedness of the social, economic and environmental aspects of an issue?
- ⌘ If we drill for oil in the Arctic, who wins and how? Who loses and how?
- ⌘ If we continue to develop agrifuels, who wins and how? Who loses and how?
- ⌘ How does consumerism impact us socially, economically and environmentally?



Integrating Our Faith: Catholic Social Teaching

(10 minutes)



Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to reflect on the interconnectedness of all of creation. How am I being called to change my thinking, relationships and behaviors in order to recognize the interconnectedness of all of creation?

“A way of life that disregards and damages God's creation, forces the poor into greater poverty, and threatens the right of future generations to a healthy environment and to their fair share of the Earth's wealth and resources, is contrary to the vision of the Gospel.”

—*The Call of Creation,*
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England, 2002

“Consumerism also raises the ecological issue. Humanity is consuming the resources of the earth and life in an excessive and disordered way, forgetting the earth's own needs and God-given purpose, provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, and overlooking our duties and obligations toward future generations.”

—*Centesimus Annus*

Leader: Turn to the person next to you and share a place in your life where you are being called to change your thinking, relationships, or behavior.

Action (10 minutes)

Leader: Let's take a few moments to look over the following suggestions for action. What other ideas do you have?

- ⌘ Eat lower on the food chain. Plant-based diets cut greenhouse gas emissions as much as shifting from a Suburban SUV to a Prius.
- ⌘ Become aware of when you are operating out of scarcity. Stop. See if you can switch and operate out of abundance. What happens?
- ⌘ Other?

Closing Prayer

(10 minutes)

Setting: Add to the ritual table a small cup for each participant.



Reader: A six year old boy was taken to an emergency room following an accident and was given a glass of milk. He asked, "How deep shall I drink?" He came from a very poor family in which something as precious as milk had to be shared

with six brothers and sisters. Drinking too deeply would cheat others.

Leader: Let's take a few moments of quiet to consider one area in my life where I will ask the question, "How deep should I drink?"

Leader: I invite anyone who would like to share briefly an area in your life where you will ask the question, how deep should I drink? As you share, pour water into one of the cups and take it with you. If you wish you may do this in silence.

Reader:
it is possible
to become one
with Earth

just as it is possible
to become one
with all people,
their pain, my pain,
their joy, my joy,
their struggle and delight
an echo of my own.

it is possible to become one.

it is possible. Amen!

Leader: I invite you to drink your water as a sign of your commitment to consider: "How deep will I drink?"

Stories of Hope

Environmental-social justice activist, Van Jones, encourages people to ask questions such as, who are being considered and who are being ignored in environmental decision making. His "Green For All" movement inspires creative solutions that equitably distribute benefits of a green economy. He created the Green Collar Act, which provides federal funding for green collar jobs to minority and low income people. Van Jones advocates for urban minority youth, helping policy makers see that youth are "renewable energy resources," and that providing training in fields like solar panel installation prevents the alternative, e.g., serving time in criminal detention. He plans to raise a billion dollars for green collar jobs by 2012.

As a **hospital volunteer in Gambia Africa, Kathryn Cunningham** witnessed unimaginable conditions and loss of life due to the lack of electrical power. Later, while attending the University of Pennsylvania, she started Power Up Gambia. This non-profit raises money for solar power in hospitals and clinics in Gambia, while educating youth in America about renewable, sustainable energy and African culture. Her creativity is affecting change by connecting issues, such as increasing reliable hospital care with alternative energy solutions.



Sr. Dorothy Stang was known for saying, "The death of the forest is the end of our lives." She wanted the poor to be part of the economic life of Brazil. To achieve

this she worked with the Pastoral Land Commission, a Catholic Church group that lobbies for land reform in Brazil. For 30 years she supported the people of Anapu, protecting the rainforest and its people from exploitation by logging firms and ranchers. Together, Dorothy and the people, built more than twenty six schools,

and developed sustainable cooperatives that gave the people economic and environmental security. Her work for social and environmental equity in the Amazon ended when she was assassinated on February 12, 2005. After her death, Brazil established several protected areas in the forest and proposed a land-use permit system for selling concessions to loggers who agreed to set aside land for settlers and indigenous groups.



Equity—Imagine that you have been chosen to establish an entirely new island community, and that you alone get to decide how to organize the society. You can pick any government, any economic system, any division of resources that you want. The only condition is this: your place in society will be chosen at random. Would this change your answer? Would you choose a system in which most resources are controlled by a few? Or would you divide resources equitably in order to ensure your access to the community's wealth, whether you were part of the elite or the underclass?

—World Watch Magazine, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2003

Greening Parishes: Care for Creation



Reading: *Passion for God, Passion for Earth*, Elizabeth Johnson, p. 51

Theme

Our responsibility to respect the life and dignity of all of creation is an essential part of our faith. We are called to live out the care for creation in our faith communities in liturgy, education, outreach and advocacy, and care for church facilities.

Opening Prayer

(15 minutes)

Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth, large bowl of water, hand towel and potted plants, one per participant or group.

Reader: “The image of our planet Earth from space, a blue marble swirling with white clouds, has become familiar to this generation...that beautiful warm blue and white circle, is everything that means anything to you—all of nature, history, music, poetry and art, birth and love and death, tears, joy, prayer, dancing...a new awareness of planet Earth as one community of life is growing among peoples everywhere.”

—Elizabeth Johnson

“We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise.”

—Earth Charter Preamble

Reflection

Leader: As we celebrate how precious all life on Earth is, we acknowledge that our actions have not always respected Earth and life in all its diversity. Let us take a few moments of quiet to reflect on one way in which I have failed to care for creation.

Ritual and Sharing

Leader: We thank you God our Creator, for your gift of water which brings life and freshness to Earth. We ask that this water may wash away our failings and brings us new life. Grant this through Christ our Redeemer. Amen!

I invite you to come to our communal bowl and share one way in which you have failed to care for creation. As you share, wash your hands and sprinkle the water on the plants as a sign of your willingness to be in right relationship with Earth. If you wish you may do this in silence.

All: Led by the Spirit of God we are becoming a flourishing humanity on a thriving Earth in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God!

Small Group Discussion

(20 minutes)

∞ What is your initial response to the reading, *Passion for God, Passion for Earth*?

“...we gaze in wonder at the world...we are wasting the world. These are signs of our Earth’s times and should be filled with meaning for people of faith. But the odd thing is...many religious people and the church as a whole are curiously silent about the Earth.”



∞ Do you agree? If so, why do you think this is the case?

“This new paradigm that defines human beings as members of Earth’s community...when coupled with a theology of the all-pervading Creator Spirit of God who does not rule in a patriarchal way but vivifies and lures...charts a path...toward partnership with Earth’s God-given power of life.”

∞ Where do you see signs of this new paradigm in your faith community?



“One stringent criterion must now measure the morality of our actions; whether or not these contribute to a sustainable Earth Community.”

- ⌘ What would change if our faith community made every decision with this criterion?

“This moment of crisis calls for a spirituality and ethics that will empower us to live in the web of life as sustainers rather than destroyers of the world. Ignoring this view keeps the church and its members locked into fatal irrelevance while the great drama is being played out in the actual wider world.”

- ⌘ Are we, the church, going to be left out of our generation’s great religious adventure, which is absolutely a matter of life or death? If so, how does this make you feel?

Large Group Discussion

(10 minutes)

Leader: We invite those who would like to share a highlight from their conversation to do so briefly.

Break (15 minutes)

“Christians realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.”

—*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility, Pope John Paul II, 1990*

Integrating Our Faith: Catholic Social Teaching

(5 minutes)

Leader: Let’s take five minutes of quiet to reflect on the bishops’ Catholic Social Teaching and

Environmental Ethics. In light of my care of creation study and Elizabeth Johnson’s article, which one of the themes am I growing in awareness of in my life? For example, the option for the poor is now inclusive of the natural world; or respect for life extends to the environment.

Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics

We believe that the following themes drawn from this tradition are integral dimensions of ecological responsibility:¹



Hope is a renewable option: if you run out of it at the end of the day you get to start over in the morning.

—*Barbara Kingsolver*

SACRAMENTAL UNIVERSE:

God-centered and sacramental view of the universe, which grounds human accountability for the fate of Earth.

RESPECT FOR LIFE:

Consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all of creation.

THE PLANETARY COMMON GOOD:

World view affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence and the common good.

A NEW SOLIDARITY:

An ethics of solidarity promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community.

UNIVERSAL PURPOSE OF CREATED THINGS:

An understanding of the universal purpose of created things, which requires equitable use of Earth’s resources.

OPTION FOR THE POOR:

An option for the poor, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world.

AUTHENTIC DEVELOPMENT:

A conception of authentic development, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.

Large Group Discussion

(5 minutes)

Leader: I invite anyone who wishes to share in a brief sentence or two one of the themes that s/he is growing in awareness of.

Action

Inspiring Change

(5 minutes)

Leader: In order to inspire change toward a sustainable Earth Community, faith communities need to be able to move beyond the perception that caring for the environment is just one more concern among many. The commitment to a healing and nurturing relationship with the environment should be a constitutive element in the mission of the parish and be evident throughout the life of the faith community. Before we talk about actions we can take in our parishes to care for creation, let's take a few minutes of quiet to reflect on the following questions. We'll use our insights when we break into small groups to talk about actions.

- ⌘ How does our church mission, or statement of purpose, articulate what it most values? How would a creation-honoring dimension be integrated into the mission?
- ⌘ How does our parish live out its mission? What committees or programs bring our mission to life?
- ⌘ Who are the leaders, people of vision and inspiration that sustain the mission and work of our parish? What are the styles of leadership and methods of decision making? Who should be approached with new ideas concerning care for creation?
- ⌘ What are the gifts and passions of members? How do members identify and share these gifts?

Greening Faith Communities

(20 minutes)

Leader: We are going to break into small groups to brainstorm ideas and strategies to incorporate care for creation into our faith communities. The groups are liturgy, education, advocacy & outreach, buildings & operations, and committees & staffing. The goal is to come up with one or two practical actions that you will take, and who will take responsibility for them. After twenty minutes we'll come back together. Each group will report on its one or two practical actions and who is responsible for them.

Liturgy

- Incorporate care for creation in liturgies, homilies and prayers.
- Plan observances for days related to care for creation, e.g., St. Francis, Earth Day, Respect Life.

- Use banners, live plants and trees that remind members of their care of creation mission.



Education

- Include care for creation materials in the library, kiosk, and bulletin.
- Include care for creation in RCIA, sacramental preparation, adult and youth education.

Outreach & Advocacy

- Find ways to connect with interfaith groups and activities.
- Learn about and promote care of creation efforts and legislation.
- Promote Fair Trade.

Buildings & Operations

- Conduct and act on an energy audit of parish buildings.
- Have a recycling program; use earth friendly cleaning and yard products.
- Use non disposable products and tap water for events.
- Audit the use of water in buildings and grounds.
- Factor energy efficiency and care for creation into remodeling plans.

“The contemplative gaze renders the whole world sacramental.”

—Elizabeth Johnson



Committees & Staffing

- Form a care for creation committee.
- Incorporate care for creation into the parish mission statement and role descriptions of staff and committees.

Large Group Sharing

(10 minutes)

Leader: I invite each group to share its one or two practical actions and who will take responsibility for them.



Closing Prayer

(15 minutes)

Leader: For our prayer each group will share one action. Each member of the group, or a representative of the group will select a plant as a sign of commitment to care for creation.

Reader: We have only begun to imagine how precious all life on Earth is.

We have only begun to discern our call to act as members of Earth Community.

We have only begun to know the power that is within us if we partner with God in the ongoing creation.

Leader: Let us join in our litany of action

Response: Led by the Spirit of God we are becoming a flourishing humanity on a thriving Earth in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God!

Liturgy shares action
Response

Education
Response

Outreach & Advocacy
Response

Buildings & Operations
Response

Committees & Staffing
Response

Closing Song:
City of God, or other

Stories of Hope

Vineyard Boise in Garden City, Idaho, is a model of green Christianity. With the help of 115 volunteers it provides free organic vegetables for those in need. Pastor Tri Robinson asks, "If the statistics are true and Christians do comprise one-third of the world's population, then what would happen if more than 2 billion people became serious about upholding the value of environmental stewardship?" Vineyard Boise is doing its share; last year they provided 20,776 pounds of vegetables.²

With the leadership of Pastor Leroy Hedman, **Georgetown Gospel Chapel in Seattle** became the first Energy Star church. The installation of energy efficient lighting, windows, insulation, and solar heating eliminated the use of one gas furnace; saved 50,000 kwh; and prevented 60,000 pounds of CO2 emissions annually. Switching to water efficient fixtures and piping reduced the church's annual water usage by 100,000 gallons. Energy efficiency measures save the church \$5,000 annually.³



The youth of **St. Mary's Parish in Bridgeport, Connecticut** reacted to the violence and decay in their inner-city neighborhood by taking an abandoned, garbage-strewn, city-owned lot and turning it into a community garden where they help the elderly maintain plots. Through the cooperation of the local water company, and a grant from the USCCB Environmental Justice Program, a water spigot was installed at the site. This made it possible for elderly

gardeners to water their vegetables without hauling water, a dangerous task in the summer heat.⁴



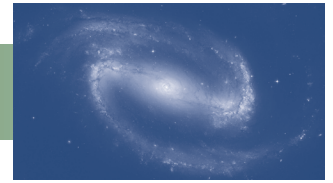
The faith community of **St. James Cathedral in Seattle** is getting "green."

It is a process with successes, challenges, and a willingness to keep taking next steps. Inspired by the JustFaith program, an environmental justice committee was formed. Among its successes are an education program on climate change; an annual environmental health fair; an "eat local - 100 mile" dinner; and composting the

food from the parish meal. Some things take more coordination and resources, e.g., increasing parish carpooling, environmental advocacy, and plant management issues like lighting efficiency. However, a promising care for creation movement is well on its way at St. James.

Send your parish stories to ipjc@ipjc.org

Universe Story Reading



Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe

Judy Cannato

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In the Beginning: The Universe Flares Fourth (Chapter Three)

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void and darkness covered the face of the deep.

—*Genesis 1:1-2*

The fire which is in the sun, the fire which is in the earth, that fire is in my own heart.

—*Maitre Upanishad 6:17*

In the beginning. The phrase is so simple that we can brush past it with little notice. But that primordial beginning is not merely an event that makes for interesting science. It marks our birth, too. Everything we are, have ever been, or hope to be is rooted in the moment when time and space began and life burst forth. Imagine being able to film the universe as it expands—then watching the rewind to see all of the separate parts converge at a single point. This is what the Big Bang theory suggests, and it is a fundamental part of the new cosmology.

Here is a brief summary of the story of the cosmos as it is now being told: The universe came into being in a flaming cosmic explosion that gave birth to space and time. By measuring such

phenomenon as cosmic microwave background radiation, scientists have determined that the birth of the universe as we know it occurred about 13.7 billion years ago. All the energy that has ever existed—and therefore all the matter that has ever existed—was formed in this single spectacular cosmic event.

Ours was a fiery birth, an unfurling of vast, raw potentiality which quickly began to take shape and form. The dense fireball that erupted in less than a trillionth of a trillionth of a second was a billion trillion times hotter than our sun. In the first millionth of a second, the fundamental principles of the entire physical universe emerged, including the laws of gravity and electromagnetism. By the first second the universe consisted of fundamental particles and energy. The collision of photons formed protons, neutrons, and electrons, the basic components of atoms. Energy was already converting to mass. By the time three minutes had passed, when the universe had cooled to one billion degrees, protons and neutrons had come together to form hydrogen and helium, elements which would eventually fuel the first generation of stars.

The timing of all this birthing is nothing short of miraculous. If the unfolding had been a trillionth of a trillionth of one percent faster, the cosmic material would have been flung too far apart for anything significant to happen. If, however, the unfolding had been a trillionth of a trillionth of one percent slower, the universe would have collapsed in upon itself.

Ten thousand years after the Big Bang most of the energy in the universe was in the form of radiation. For the next three hundred thousand years the universe continued to expand and cool until the amount of energy in the form of radiation and the amount of energy in the form of matter were about equal. This made possible the next major development. Three hundred million years after the Big Bang the first stars and galaxies emerged, forming clusters as the universe continued to expand.

The next phase of the unfolding of the universe was extraordinarily turbulent. Great galactic collisions took place, setting off cosmic explosions of gas. Some galaxies survived, while others did not. Some continued to create stars, while others did not. It was in these first stars that the primary elements were formed: carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, copper, silver, silicon, magnesium, calcium, sulfur, and iron—all the elements that are components of life today.

The flaring forth continued. Stars aged, then died in great supernova explosions. A supernova is the death eruption of a star, which happens in a dazzling cloud of light, followed by a gradual fading. We know from seeing images from the Hubble Space Telescope just how brilliant these supernovas are—radiating more light than an entire galaxy of stars. The birth of our own solar system—Sun, Earth, our neighbor planets and planetoids—came as the result of a supernova explosion that occurred about five billion years ago.¹

What a beginning! What a miracle that we are here, both as a species and as persons. Since all the matter that now exists was formed in that initial bursting forth of life, we must each be formed out of the primordial dust that became stars. Our true moment of birth cannot be measured in decades. We are 13.7 billion years old! We carry within us the very energy that fashioned the stars. We carry within us the evolution of the elements, eons of development that resulted in who we are today. We carry within us the fire that flared forth into life. As Bede Griffiths put it,

The explosion of matter in the universe fifteen billion years ago is present to all of us. Each one of us is part of the effect of that one original explosion such that, in our unconscious, we are linked up with the very beginning of the universe and with the matter of the universe from the earliest stages of its formation. In that sense the universe is within us.²

How accustomed we are to thinking of the universe as something “out there,” something accessible only by telescope or rocket ship, something completely separate from us. And now we know that this is

not the case. Energy in the form of matter has been developing, rearranging, reconstituting, evolving, growing, transcending since the beginning of spacetime itself. Think of this: In its latent potential, the embodied person that you are at this very moment—all the constituents that would eventually come together into the person that is you—was present in the Big Bang. Radically amazing!

The new narrative of the unfolding of the universe does not contradict our Christian story, but actually resonates with it quite well. Our faith tradition has always maintained that there was a beginning—a moment in which time began, in which a mighty and holy power hovered, brooded over, and birthed all that is. We believe all creation has come about through the movement of the Mystery we call God. We believe not only that God initiated the creation event, but that divine presence flows in and through the experience of ongoing creation. Although the Creator cannot be reduced to the creation event or the universe that has been formed, neither is God separate from all that is. The Creator’s presence in the form of life itself is woven into the fabric of the universe, apparent to all who take the time to see.

One of the truly amazing discoveries of all time comes not from science, but from the experience of simple people from simple places who have been able to see, who have been able to recognize God’s presence in the simplicity of their lives. They have recognized that the Holy One says not only to Jeremiah, but to each of us, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5). We are known by the God who, in some mysterious and magnificent way, willed life into being—and with it our particular being. With those who have gone before us in faith we can pray

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become the night,”
even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

—Ps 139:7-12

Not even darkness can hinder the God who is light, whose presence permeates every moment of our lives, no matter whether we are in the heights or depths of human experience. In a way that remains a mystery, the Holy One overcame the darkness of nonbeing, bursting forth as light and life that is unceasing in its dynamism and creativity. *That* is the reality that underpins the life of the universe and each creature's life as well.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola invites the one who prays to "Consider that God, your benefactor, is present in all creatures and in yourself. If you look at every step of the visible creation, in all you will meet God."³ God, Ignatius goes on to say, is in the elements, giving them existence; in plants, giving them life; in animals, giving them sensation. God, he concludes "is in you; and, collecting all these degrees of being scattered through the rest of ... creation, God unites them in you."⁴ Written in the sixteenth century, these words echo with truth in a vibrant new way when heard by twenty-first century ears. Ignatius taught that it is possible to find God in all things, that all creation pulses with the life that has its origin in God. Science affirms just how integrally connected we really are.

Even as we acknowledge that God is in all things, living in awareness and operating out of attentiveness to that reality is another matter. If we do not cultivate attentive awareness we will miss the divine presence springing forth all around us in unrestrained beauty and power. If we do not have moments of pause, we will be incapable of the long loving looks that make us springs of beauty and power who are forces of compassion and service in the world. Fostering a contemplative practice and perspective are critical components of co-creativity.

A spiritual practice that many find helpful is Christian meditation, or centering prayer. This discipline is rooted in centuries of experience and allows us to support and maintain a contemplative stance. The basic elements are simple: Sit straight

and still, allowing your eyes to close or lower to the ground and your hands to rest comfortably on your lap. Breathe slowly and regularly, being aware of your abdomen filling and emptying. Some practitioners find it helpful to use a mantra or sacred word or phrase such as "fill me," "free me," "I love you," or "come, Holy Spirit." These words are not spoken aloud but repeated interiorly and in harmony with breathing. The choice of a word or phrase is not as important as what the repetition of the word or phrase does—slowing the breathing and allowing the mind to grow still so that the body relaxes and incessant thinking diminishes or stops. James Finley recommends that as we sit, we remain "present, open and awake, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything."⁵ Thoughts will come—all the things we plan to do or want to do or forgot to do or choose to worry about—but we simply let those thoughts go without judgment and return to our breathing or phrase.

When we first begin a contemplative practice it is easy to become frustrated with all the thoughts that bombard our prayer. Do not become discouraged. "Success" and "doing it right" are not significant here. What is significant is remaining faithful to the process of prayer and allowing your body, mind, and spirit to come into harmony. This normally takes some time. Be assured that even when you sit and find yourself assailed by an unruly mind or fidgety body, you will still experience benefits from your fidelity to prayer. You will find yourself more peaceful and more compassionate with the world around you. If this practice is unfamiliar or difficult for you, consult with a spiritual director or someone trained in facilitating this kind of prayer. James Finley and Thomas Keating each have books and audio recordings that are helpful as well.⁶

As we envision the Big Bang and the birthing process that it ignited, we are awed by the utter incomprehensibility, the utter grandeur of creation—and the Creator who is birthgiver and sustainer. Like the psalmist we cry out "How marvelous are your works, O God!" or "How radically amazing!" Each and every one of us is the result of 13.7 billion years of hovering by the God whose name is Love, the Holy One who

continues to shape and fashion, continues to call us to live deeply awed and intensely committed as we participate co-creatively in this radically amazing story. Our life is rooted in and connected to all life—all that has been, all that will be. We are not final products, end result of a single act. We are participants in a single, on-going act of Creation.

WE COME TO CONTEMPLATION

- ★ *Close your eyes and imagine in slow motion the beginning of life—the brilliance of the initial flaring forth . . . the transparency . . . the formation of galaxies and their collision as stars emerge . . . the formation of elements . . . the supernova explosion that gave birth to the planetary system that is our home . . . the formation of Earth and all her creatures. . . . Imagine the Creator who directs this process, who continues to hover and brood and birth all life.*
- ★ *Slowly read the first two verses in Genesis, allowing any new awareness to arise: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void and darkness covered the face of the deep.*
- ★ *How do you describe or image God? Does this view of creation change how you think of God?*
- ★ *How does it change how you think about yourself and all others?*
- ★ *What in this chapter do you find challenging? What do you find radically amazing?*
- ★ *Sit quietly for a moment. What does the Spirit want you to see? How do you respond?*

WE PRAY

Holy One, you who fashioned time and space itself, we are in awe of your work, radically amazed by your ceaseless creativity and love. We see your hand in the first flaring forth, your revelation and grace in each successive step along the way. Even now you manifest your presence in this moment as it unfolds, here, now, and permeates all creation. Help us to grow in our ability to attend to you and your presence in all that is. May our contemplative awareness deepen and allow us to see more clearly your creativity and your love. Amen.

Notes

1. There are a number of websites that offer visual representations of the Big Bang. Among my favorite is the one operated by PBS. Check out www.pbs.org/deepspace/timeline and www.pbs.org/wnet/hawking.
2. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1989), 30.
3. Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Quotable Saint* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2002) 4. See also Louis J. Puhls, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 102.
4. Ibid.
5. James Finley, *Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 24.
6. Audio recordings include *Christian Meditation* by James Finley (Boulder, CO: Sounds True) and *The Contemplative Journey* by Thomas Keating (Boulder, CO: Sounds True).



The Comforting Whirlwind: God and the Environmental Crisis

Sermon by Bill McKibben

Delivered at the First Religious Society, Unitarian—
Universalist Carlisle, Massachusetts—March 18, 2001

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Well good morning to you all... I feel called upon to talk to you about questions of the environment, which seem to me to be at the root of the interesting, powerful, profound, spiritual issues of our time.

I wrote a book some years ago called *The Age of Missing Information*. Strange book. I went out and found the largest cable television system in the whole world, which at the time was in Fairfax, Virginia and had 100 channels. I got people in Fairfax to tape everything that came across those 100 channels. I took it home to the Adirondacks and viewed all of it: roughly 2,000 hours of programming. The message, distilled down to its essence, which comes through that television all the time, is simple: "You are the most important thing on earth, the heaviest object in the known universe."

If you had to pick one message that was most effective for building a huge, strong economy that would probably be it. It has worked incredible wonders. We have consumed and produced and raised our standard of living in ways that no one in any previous time or place could even have imagined. We have created what passes in physical terms for a Utopia, where we live in comfort and convenience and security.

But if you wanted to create a message that was profoundly troubling from a spiritual point of view and one that made progress on issues of great importance, especially issues of the environment, very difficult, you couldn't pick a better one than "You're the most important thing on earth. You're the center of the planet." This is an old question: where do we stand in relation to everything else.

This seems to me the question that animates Job. All of you probably know the book of Job as well as I do, so forgive me for running over it briefly. Job—prosperous man, good man, always does his bit for the community, treats his family well—one day wakes up and finds himself seemingly cursed by God. His cattle start dying of hoof and mouth disease, his children die, his property is taken from him, he ends up living in a dung heap at the edge of town covered with oozing sores. As one would in such a situation, he begins to question why this has happened to him. His friends come and visit, representing the orthodoxy of the day, and they tell him it must be because he has sinned. He must have done something and now God is punishing him. This is the standard operating procedure of that day, the standard operating belief.

Job, surprisingly, won't take that for an answer. He keeps saying, "But I didn't do anything that bad. There must be some other explanation," and he audaciously demands an interview with God. Job wants God to justify God's self. Job demands this in increasingly belligerent language and finally God appears. God appears speaking in a voice from a whirlwind. It's an amazing diatribe. Job has stirred up a hornet's nest. God is in a sarcastic mood and keeps asking him, "Well, where were you when I laid this whole thing out? Do you know how to stop the waves from breaking? Do you know where they should go? Do you know where I keep the hail and the snow? Do you hunt game for the lioness?" On and on and on down the whole list. It's a beautiful piece of writing.... Probably the most beautiful and biologically accurate and sexy and crunchy piece of writing we have.

On the one hand its message is clear, I think: Job, and by extension the rest of us, are not at the absolute center of God's universe. We're one small part of a large creation, cut down to size in the course of God's diatribe. But that's not the only message. The other message is that this world of which we are a part is incredibly beautiful, full of meaning and sweetness and beauty.

“Do you show the hawk how to fly stretching his wings to the wind? Do you teach the vulture to soar and build his nest in the clouds? He makes his home on the mountaintop. On the unapproachable crag he sits and scans for prey. From far off his eyes can spot it, his little ones drink its blood. The unburied are his.”

These things, which are in some sense most vile to us, are clearly dear to God. This world is not always as we see it through our own particular lenses of justice and rightness. Then God asked Job, “Has God’s accuser resigned? Has he swallowed his tongue?” Job simply says, “I am speechless. What can I answer? I put my hand on my mouth. I have said too much already. Now I will speak no more.” Which seems like a good answer in this situation.

That has been one of the profound ways in which human beings have understood the relationship with the world—that there is some force larger than us, perceived in the operations of the physical universe around us. That’s one of the ways that we have managed to remind ourselves to keep our hubris within at least some bounds. In our time that answer is changing. That answer is disappearing. Human beings are putting themselves not only at the center in the sort of ways that we always have—in our pride and in our appetite—but also increasingly in the absolute chemical reality of the planet on which we live.

Let’s take the example of climate change. Right about the industrial revolution human beings began burning large amounts of coal, gas, and oil, carbon-based fuels. One effect is obviously the kind of pollution we are used to—smog over cities etc.—that’s a minor effect. The major effect is that when you burn those fossil fuels, you release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. A colorless, odorless, non-poisonous gas the concentration of which in this room is higher than it will ever be outdoors, but a gas which by its molecular composition traps heat close to the atmosphere—heat that would otherwise radiate back out to space. The atmospheric concentration of CO₂ was about 275 parts per million before the industrial revolution. It is now about 385 parts per million and it will be above 500 parts per million long before the middle of this century unless we

do very dramatic things in the next few years to dramatically curtail our use of fossil fuels. If we don’t, we have now been warned by scientists whose data has grown ever stronger and more robust exactly what to expect.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 1,500 climatologists from around the world spent the last five years in an endless series of research and analysis on this problem. Their last five-year assessment released January 2001, reported that in this century we can expect to see the global average temperature increase about 4 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit. That would take it to levels higher than it’s ever been in human history, indeed than it’s ever been long before human history. If everything tops out at the upper end of the parameter we could see average global temperatures increases as high as 11 degrees Fahrenheit. The planet would go from about 59 degrees at present to about 70 degrees.

Any of those changes are completely unacceptable, we know that they are unacceptable because we’ve already increased the temperature about one degree Fahrenheit and we’ve begun to see what happens when we do. For instance, the world gets a lot stormier, a lot wetter. That’s because warm air, in the fashion that God designed this planet, warm air holds more vapor than cold air. So to increase the temperature you get a lot more evaporation in arid places and you get a lot more drought. That evaporated water has to come down somewhere, so in places where it’s wet you get a lot more precipitation, a lot more flooding. Severe storms that drop more than two inches of rain in a twenty-four hour period have increased about twenty percent across this continent against the baseline. That’s a very large increase in a basic physical phenomenon.

Consider what is happening to the cryosphere, to the frozen parts of the planet. Every glacier system in the world is now in rapid retreat, and remember this is just with a one degree rise in global average temperature. By 2015 the snows of Kilimanjaro will have completely melted. Glacier National Park will have no glaciers by about 2030. The ice cap over the Arctic has thinned forty percent in the last forty years. We have tremendous data on that because we ran nuclear submarines underneath it for a long time and we know how thick the ice has been and it’s now almost half melted away. Those are

unbelievably large changes in very fundamental elements of this planet in a very, very short time. They come with real consequences.

Forgive me for using harsh language for a few minutes, but I'm going to. I have been working on these issues for ten or twelve years and have reached the point where I am unwilling to pussyfoot around them too much longer. These things are happening in large measure because of us. We in this country burn twenty-five percent of the world's fossil fuel, create twenty-five percent of the world's carbon dioxide. It is the affluent lifestyles that we lead that overwhelmingly contribute to this problem. And to call it a problem is to understate what it really is. Which is a crime. Crime against the poorest and most marginalized people on this planet. We've never figured out, though God knows we've tried, a more effective way to destroy their lives. I spent much of last summer in Bangladesh, a wonderful country, vibrant, green, alive, feeds itself even though there's 130 million people in an area the size of Wisconsin. Amazing place. The biggest problem is that it is low to the Bay of Bengal, it's a river delta. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra come pouring out of the Himalayas, cascading down through the mountains, and they flatten out when they reach Bangladesh and broaden out. The country is half water, it's as much water as soil. That's one of the reasons it's so fertile. Every year the rivers flood out and lay this little beautiful layer of silt, and things pop out of the ground.

But let's say you raise the level of the Bay of Bengal just a few inches, (by every forecast, the level of the sea at least a foot in the next fifty years). Then those waters cascading under the Himalayas have no place to go and they just back up and go out all over Bangladesh. That's what happened in 1998. The water was a little higher than usual in the Bay of Bengal and a lot of water was coming down out of the mountains and for about ninety days, about a quarter of the year, two-thirds of the country of Bangladesh was in thigh deep water or worse. That's just how people lived. They are incredibly adaptable and resourceful and did a heck of a lot better living in thigh deep water than we would have. But they can't do that year after year after year. Can't plant the rice crop. They weren't food self sufficient that year. And Bangladesh is just one

on the list of a hundred places that will be similarly traumatized in this century to come unless we do really significant things.

It's a crime against the rest of creation, against all the other interesting corners of God's brain, against the lion and the antelope and the vulture and you can just go on down the list. Think about coral reefs. I'm sure some of you have taken vacations in the tropics and dived on coral reefs. Enchanting beyond belief. An ecosystem almost impossible to imagine in its jewel-like beauty and its gentleness. Coral reefs, by current forecasts, will probably disappear as an ecosystem by about 2050. As ocean water temperatures increase, the small animals that create the coral, the reefs, die off. They're bleached, they die. Once those corals begin to die, all the fish populations that they support die off and so on up the chain. In fifty years our only record of this world beneath the waves may be the films and pictures and things that we've made of them.

Imagine the polar bear — this incredible incarnation of the other, fiercest of our brethren, uninterested in us, not scared of us. The polar bears in large parts of the Canadian north are about twenty percent skinnier than they were ten years ago. As the ice pack melts, it becomes incredibly difficult to hunt seals, which is what polar bears do for a living. No pack ice, no hunting, no polar bears.

It's a crime against the future, against everyone who is going to come after us. No one has ever figured out a better way to permanently alter and degrade the world around us than this. To strip mine the future. If we could imagine how we would feel about people who would have done that to us several generations ago, if it had happened then, then we can imagine how people will one day consider us in this regard, unless again, we do something soon.

Though our scientific system has done a tremendous job alerting us to the dimensions of climate change, we are not doing anything meaningful about it. Our political system, our cultural system, so far has yet to respond in any significant way. The reason that it hasn't responded goes back to the question with which we began. As long as we consider ourselves to be enviably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it

is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change...

In 2001, the US Administration announced that it was not going to regulate carbon dioxide in any way, that in essence it is going to kill off the Kyoto Treaty, the one attempt internationally to deal with these questions. The reason? Their analysis had indicated that taking any steps would drive up the price of electricity and that would hurt American consumers. Well, they are correct. It is going to cost some money to transition from coal and oil and gas to a renewable energy future. It is going to cost some money and the Administration doesn't think we're going to stand for it. They might well be right and that may be the calculation they're making.

So that's where you and I are right now. How do we get off this dime? How do we learn to stop putting ourselves at the center of everything and help our neighbors, our culture, our country understand the same thing? How do we rise to the obvious challenge that is put before us in our time—the challenge that is just as square faced as the civil rights challenge was a generation ago or the challenge of fascism a generation before that.

I don't have any easy answers for you. In fact, I should probably just stop here, having alarmed you enough. Let me suggest, at the risk of getting in trouble, that there are a few beginning symbolic but powerful things we could start to do. This issue of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is coming before us today as a country. It has been presented as wilderness versus oil drilling and it's true that drilling would harm that wilderness. But underneath that wilderness is a big pool of oil. If we bring that oil out and burn it, we release more of that carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. We heat the planet a little bit more. We do a little bit more to contribute to making the Arctic Wildlife Refuge no longer a place of permafrost and caribou, but a place of muskeg swamp where no caribou will tread...

Let's try to bring this as close to home as possible, probably uncomfortably close. It's not just actions in Alaska. It's actions all around us that are important. Symbols all around us. Symbols like the huge houses we are building and do not need. Symbols like, and here's one that I think we can act on quickly, symbols like the sport utility vehicles,

SUVs. Now I grew up in Lexington and I was amazed when I'd come back to visit in recent years. I live up in the Adirondacks, where it actually is sort of icy and we have bad roads, but no one has any money, so they just drive cars or maybe pickups. I was amazed to come back to Lexington a few years ago to see my folks and went down to the Stop & Shop to get a few groceries. It looked as if the 8th Armored Infantry had come to Lexington on maneuvers. The only logical conclusion you could possibly have drawn is that Lexington had suddenly been riven by three or four raging rivers one had to cross in order to get groceries. If you drive a normal car and a big SUV the same average distance for a year, in that one year the differential in the amount of energy you use, hence the amount of CO₂ you put in the atmosphere, is the equivalent of opening your refrigerator door and leaving it open for six years.

That's what we're talking about in realistic terms and in symbolic terms. What we're talking about is the endless, gullible elevation of levels of comfort and status and everything else at the complete expense of all around us. It's going to take us a long time to learn how to climb down a little bit from the heights on which we have put ourselves. We've been at this work for a very long time. All the witness of our religious gurus notwithstanding, we've done a good job of paying them lip service and going on about our ways. Now the signals from the physical world, from God's creation, tell us that we have definitively gone too far and it is time to turn around. We will need each other's encouragement and help in doing that.

Our religious communities are deeply important, almost the only institutions left in our society that posit some goal other than accumulation for our existence here on this planet. Take good care of each other, but don't just take good care of each other—push each other a little bit too. This work has to be done fast and it has to be done lovingly, and it has to be done not only with an eye on the temperature around us, but with an eye on the temperature inside of us—on our understanding of who we really are, not who we've been told we are over and over and over again by all the images that flow through the cable or through the billboard or any of the places that we increasingly have come to find our identity.



Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water

Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke

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Red Alert: How The World is Running Out of Fresh Water (Chapter 1)

Water has been an important symbol in the legends and histories of many ancient cultures. Unlike people living in the urban, industrialized nations of the 21st century, most humans throughout history knew that their water resources could run out, and they developed a healthy respect for conserving whatever water they found. In biblical times, when Isaac returned to the land where his father Abraham had lived, the old wells he opened up were so important to life that they became a subject of dispute with other tribespeople. Later, Jacob's well was so highly prized and carefully protected that it was in use during the days of Jesus many centuries later.

Other societies, like the traditional Inuit and the early Mesopotamians, placed equal importance on the water that sustained the lives of their people. The Inuit depended largely on water-dwelling seals, fish, and walrus for their food, and their deity was a goddess of water, Nuliajuk. She ruled her realm with ferocious justice, and all of her power came from water. Nuliajuk gave the Inuit food from the sea and ice to build houses. When she withheld her gifts, no one could live. In the

strikingly different world of the early Mesopotamians, water was treasured for different reasons. Before this group moved to the fertile valleys of northern Iraq, they lived in the dry plains of the south. They did manage to harness water for their farms, but it was very scarce. That is why their water-god, Enki, became one of the most important deities in their pantheon.

Thousands of miles away, in China, the dangers of drought became a theme of one myth, in which a Great Archer shot down nine out of ten suns, to prevent the Earth from drying out. Chinese tradition also held that water and other elements of the Earth exist in a balance that should not be disturbed. If there was a disruption in the normal cycles of Nature, Chinese governors were called upon to alleviate the problem. They were expected to help make up for the harm done to crops by reducing taxes or by distributing grain from the country's storehouses. Today, the normal cycles of Nature are being disrupted by climate change and the abuse of almost every water system on Earth. However, unlike governments that followed the Chinese tradition described above, our governments are abdicating their responsibility to protect and conserve water, and they are handing its management over to the private sector.

Corporate control of the world's water resources and distribution systems is a threat to the well-being of humans around the world because water is fundamental to life. All living ecosystems are sustained by water and the hydrological cycle. Ancient peoples, and those living closer to the forces of Nature in today's world, knew that to destroy water was to destroy self. Only modern "advanced" cultures, driven by acquisition and convinced of their supremacy over Nature, have failed to revere water. The consequences are evident in every corner of the globe: parched deserts and cities, destroyed wetlands, contaminated waterways, and dying children and animals.

Nature is not entirely benign, and like the water-goddess of the Inuit, it will not tolerate this

abuse forever. The signs are all present. If we do not soon change our relationship to water and the ecosystems that sustain it, all our wealth and knowledge will be meaningless. We are as dependent on fresh water for life as our ancient ancestors were. But many do not seem to be aware that this precious resource is disappearing. The clock is ticking, but they do not know it.

Finite Supplies

We'd like to believe there's an infinite supply of fresh water on the planet, and many of us have used water as if it would never run out. But the assumption is tragically false. Available fresh water amounts to less than one-half of one percent of all the water on Earth. The rest is sea water, frozen in the polar ice, or water stored in the ground that is inaccessible to us. The hard news is this: humanity is depleting, diverting, and polluting the planet's fresh water resources so quickly and relentlessly that every species on Earth—including our own—is in mortal danger. The Earth's water supply is finite. Not only is there the same amount of water on the planet as there was at its creation; it is almost all the same water. Only a small amount may enter our atmosphere in the form of "snow comets" from the outer parts of the solar system. But even if the snow comet theory is correct, the speculated amount of water involved is so modest, it would do nothing to alleviate the shortage crisis.

The total amount of water on Earth is approximately 1.4 billion cubic kilometers (about 330 million cubic miles). Canadian naturalist E.C. Pielou helps us visualize this statistic: if all the water on Earth were solidified into a cube, each edge of the cube would be about 1,120 kilometers (about 695 miles) long, approximately twice the length of Lake Superior. The amount of *fresh* water on Earth, however, is approximately 36 million cubic kilometers (about 8.6 million cubic miles), a mere 2.6 percent of the total. Of this only 11 million cubic kilometers (about 2.6 million cubic miles), or .77 percent, counts as part of the water cycle in that it circulates comparatively quickly. However, fresh water is renewable only by rainfall. So in the end, humans can rely only on the 34,000 cubic kilometers (about 8,000 cubic miles) of rain that annually from the "runoff" that goes back to the oceans via rivers and

groundwater. This is the only water considered "available" for human consumption because it can be harvested without depleting finite water sources.

Rain forms a crucial part of the hydrological cycle, the process through which water circulates from the atmosphere to the Earth and back, from a height of 15 kilometers (about 9 miles) above the ground to a depth of kilometers (3 miles) beneath it. Water that evaporates from the oceans and water systems of the continents goes into the atmosphere, creating a protective envelope around the planet. It turns into saturated water steams, which create clouds, and when those clouds cool rain is formed. Raindrops fall on the Earth's surface and soak into the ground, where they become groundwater. This underground water, in turn, comes back to the Earth's surface in the form of sourcepoints for streams and rivers. Surface water and ocean water then evaporate into the atmosphere, starting the cycle anew.

Most of the Earth's fresh water, however, is stored underground, just below the surface or deeper down. This is called groundwater, and it is 60 times greater in volume than the water that lies on the Earth's surface. There are many types of groundwater, but the most important type for humans is "meteoric water"—moving groundwater that circulates as part of the water cycle, feeding above-ground rivers and lakes. Underground water reservoirs which are known as aquifers are relatively stable because they are secured in bodies of rock. Many of them are closed systems—that is, they are not fed by meteoric water at all. Wells and boreholes drilled into aquifers are fairly secure sources of water because they tap into these large reservoirs, but to be useful over time, an aquifer must be replenished with new water at approximately the same rate as the rate of extraction. However, around the world, people are extracting groundwater at rapid rates to supplement declining supplies of surface water.

Multiple Threats

All of the above-noted water sources are being taxed to their limit for multiple reasons. First, the world's population is exploding. Ten years

from now India will have an extra 250 million people and Pakistan's population will almost double, to 210 million. In five of the world's "hot spots" of water dispute—the Aral Sea region, the Ganges, the Jordan, the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates—the populations of the nations within each basin are projected to climb by between 45 and 75 percent by 2025. By that year, China will see a population increase greater than the entire population of the United States, and the world will house an additional 2.6 billion people—a 57 percent increase over today's level of 6.1 billion. To feed this many human beings, says the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), agricultural production will have to increase by 50 percent. In such a scenario, demand for fresh water will obviously explode. As Allerd Stikker of the Amsterdam-based Ecological Management Foundation explains,

The issue today, put simply, is that while the only renewable source of freshwater is continental rainfall ... [a finite amount of water], the world population keeps increasing by roughly 85 million per year. Therefore the availability of freshwater per head is decreasing rapidly.

Furthermore, increasing numbers of people are moving to cities, where dense populations place terrible strains on limited water supplies and make delivery of sanitation services next to impossible. For the first time in history, as many people now live in cities as in rural communities. There are 22 cities in the world with populations of over 10 million inhabitants. By 2030, says the UN, the world's cities will have grown 160 percent, and twice as many people will live in cities as in the countryside.

Second, as a result of many factors, per capita water consumption is exploding. Global consumption of water is doubling every 20 years, more than twice the rate of human population growth. Technology and sanitation systems, particularly those in the wealthy industrialized nations, have allowed people to use far more water than they need. The average Canadian household now consumes 500,000 liters of water every year (about 130,000 US gallons); each toilet—and many homes have more than one—uses 18 liters of water

per flush (about five US gallons). And enormous amounts of water are lost through leakage in municipal infrastructure in countries all over the world. Yet even with the explosion in personal water use, households and municipalities account for only 10 percent of water use.

Industry claims the next big chunk of the world's fresh water supplies, at 20 to 25 percent, and its demands are dramatically increasing. Industrial use of water is predicted to double by 2025 if current growth trends persist. Massive industrialization is throwing off the balance between humans and Nature on many continents, especially in rural Latin America and Asia, where export-oriented agribusiness is claiming more and more of the water once used by small farmers for food self-sufficiency. Latin America and other Third World regions also host more than eight hundred free trade zones, where assembly lines produce goods for the global consumer elite, and these operations are another major drain on local water supplies.

Many of the world's growing industries are water intensive. It takes 400,000 liters (105,000 US gallons) of water to make one car. Computer manufacturers use massive quantities of de-ionized fresh water to produce their goods and are constantly searching for new sources. In the United States alone, the industry will soon be using over 1,500 billion liters (396 billion US gallons) of water and producing over 300 billion liters (79 billion US gallons) of wastewater each year. Originally thought to be a clean industry, high-tech has left a staggering pollution legacy in its short history. Silicon Valley has more Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) toxic Superfund sites than any other area in the U.S. and more than 150 groundwater contamination sites, many related to high-tech manufacturing. Close to 30 percent of the groundwater beneath and around Phoenix, Arizona has been contaminated, well over half by the high-tech sector.

Irrigation for crop production claims the remaining 65 to 70 percent of all water used by humans. While some of this water use is for small farms, particularly in the Third World, increasing amounts are being used for industrial farming, which notoriously overuses and wastes water.

These corporate farming practices are subsidized by the governments of industrialized countries and their taxpayers, and this creates a strong disincentive for farm operations to move to conservation practices such as drip irrigation. Much of the water usage that comes under this 65 percent heading should really be considered industrial, since modern factory farms have very little resemblance to community farms in any part of the world.

In addition to population growth and increasing per capita water consumption, massive pollution of the world's surface water systems has placed a great strain on remaining supplies of clean fresh water. Global deforestation, destruction of wetlands, the dumping of pesticides and fertilizers into waterways, and global warming are all taking a terrible toll on the Earth's fragile water systems. Another source of pollution is the damming and diversion of water systems, which have been linked to unsafe concentrations of mercury and water-borne diseases. And many such projects are being constructed throughout the world. The number of large dams worldwide has climbed from just over 5,000 in 1950 to 40,000 today, and the number of waterways altered for navigation has grown from fewer than 9,000 in 1900 to almost 500,000. In the northern hemisphere, we have harnessed and tamed three-quarters of the flow from the world's major rivers to power our cities.

At the same time, overexploitation of the planet's major river systems is threatening another finite source of water. "The Nile in Egypt, the Ganges in South Asia, the Yellow River in China, and the Colorado River in America are among the major rivers that are so dammed, diverted, or overlapped that little or no fresh water reaches its final destination for significant stretches of time," warns Sandra Postel of the Global Water Policy Project in Amherst, Massachusetts.

In fact, the Colorado is so oversubscribed on its journey through seven U.S. states that there is virtually nothing left to go out to sea. The flows of the Rio Grande and upper Colorado rivers are in danger of being reduced by as much as 75 percent and 40 percent, respectively, over the next century, and in 2001, for the first time in recorded history,

the Rio Grande ceased to flow into the Gulf of Mexico.

Water levels of the Great Lakes have also hit record lows in recent years. In 2001, the water was more than a meter below its seasonal average in the Port of Montreal, and Lakes Michigan and Huron were down by 57 centimeters (about 22 inches). Water flows in the St. Lawrence River are greatly affected by the water tables of the Great Lakes, and the environmental watchdog groups are warning that one day, the St. Lawrence may no longer reach the Atlantic Ocean.

Toxics Reading



Mindful Living: Human Health, Pollution, & Toxics

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As people of faith, we often turn to the Bible for advice on how we should live and improve our lives. Turning to scripture, we often think of self-improvement and self-care in spiritual terms and seek ways to purify our souls, make our hearts more loving, and better conform our minds to Christ. For issues that concern our physical bodies, however, most of us are conditioned to look elsewhere for answers. And yet, despite this, the Bible does teach us how we must think about and care for our bodies. Scripture teaches us that we are all created in the image of God and that our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit.

We honor God when we take steps to foster an environment that promotes healthy living for creation and for each other. When we disregard the importance of a world that is clean and safe, however, our bodily temples suffer, and we fall short in honoring our Creator.

The pervasiveness of pollution across the land, water, and air, and the presence of harmful chemicals in the manufacturing process of nearly every [human]-made item, make the health dangers of chemicals and pollution a sobering problem. Household cleaning products contain potential poisons. The food on our tables can contain harmful pesticides. Even our water, used for drinking, bathing, cleaning, and cooking, may be contaminated with dangerous chemicals. Pollution of the air and water, and the presence of harmful chemicals in everyday household items contribute to an unprecedented incidence of illness. Environmental degradation has been linked to diseases that range from asthma and cancer to developmental disorders in children.

In fact, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable to these widespread contaminants. This unnecessary burden of a polluted Earth is an insult to the perfection of God's creation and a desecration to our bodily temples.

Toxic pollution is also a justice issue. Toxic pollutants and chemicals disproportionately threaten the health of low-income communities and communities of color. According to the report, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007*, issued by the United Church of Christ, "people of color make up the majority of those living in host neighborhoods within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the nation's hazardous waste facilities."¹

Yet, despite these alarming realities, there is hope for change. With mindful living, active citizenship, responsive governmental action, and business leadership, we can all live out God's vision for our lives with wholeness and abundance.

Our Covenantal Relationship

From the beginning of time, people have lived in an interdependent relationship with God's Earth. In Genesis 1, all of creation was declared by God to be good. The light and dark, the Earth and sky, the land and sea, the plants and trees, all the wild animals, and the fullness of humankind were all formed in love and with the intention to carry out the work of God. Humanity was given the privileged, yet difficult, task of acting as stewards of God's Earth and preserving the life-sustaining work of creation. Our role, as stewards of God's creation, calls us to work for the abundant and healthy environment that we all need and depend on for our existence.

We Know Not What We Do

Too often, humanity forgets its God-given responsibility to care for all of creation. Instead, we abuse our privileged positions as stewards and treat the world as a means to serve our own selfish purposes. When we use up God's abundance for the immediate benefit of ourselves alone, we have forgotten our responsibility as stewards.

The architect of this world masterfully designed a system in which all elements are related for the common good and for the sustainability of life itself. When we overstep the bounds of our role within this system, we run the risk of turning creation into a wasteland.

Pollution Problems

Pollution occurs when human activities contaminate God's Earth with harmful substances. This contamination, which can occur in the water, air, and land, not only endangers human health but has devastating effects on the rest of God's creation. Air pollution is often caused by carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, chloroflourocarbons (CFCs), and nitrogen oxides produced by motor vehicles, power plants, and industrial processes. Water pollution, which often occurs as a result of surface runoff from farmland or urban areas, can contaminate waterways and ground water with toxics, pesticides, or excess nutrients. Soil contamination occurs when chemicals such as heavy metals, herbicides, or pesticides are absorbed into the ground. Increased awareness of pollution problems has led to governmental policies such as vehicle emission controls, the Clean Air Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1963, and the Clean Water Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1977.

Toxic Legacies

Synthetic chemicals are pervasive in our modern lives—in our homes, schools, and churches. These seemingly invisible, yet toxic chemicals, are found in everyday items from baby bottles to personal care products to the food we eat. These synthetic chemicals and heavy metals in consumer products, building materials, cleaners, and plastics are contributing to unprecedented incidences of illness and disease ranging from asthma to cancer.

Over the last one hundred years, we have produced millions of tons of chemicals for the manufacture of new products. Some of these chemicals have made our lives faster and more

convenient. While many of these chemicals were rigorously tested to ensure that they could perform their intended tasks, their long-term impact on our bodies and on the rest of creation has been largely ignored. More than 82,000 synthetic chemicals are currently in use. Only ten percent have been minimally tested for their effects on human health. Nearly 1,000 new chemicals are being introduced each year. These largely untested, unregulated chemicals end up in our food, water, air, and consumer products, and have serious implications for our health and wellness.

Effects of Toxic Chemicals

A study by the British Medical Journal concluded that seventy-five percent of most cancers are caused by environmental and lifestyle factors. In fact, most Americans have between 400 to 800 chemicals stored in their bodies, typically in fat cells. Health effects of toxic chemicals include cancer, asthma, birth defects, and autism. According to a 2002 report by the Environmental Protection Agency, in the year 2000, over 7.1 billion pounds of 650 different industrial chemicals were released in the air and water; 266 of these are linked to birth defects.

For example, toxic flame retardants, such as PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers), have been linked to behavioral problems, birth defects, and a decrease in thyroid hormone levels. Similarly, perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), chemicals used to make materials stain and stick resistant, are likely human carcinogens. Also, various types of pesticides, which are chemicals sprayed onto our foods to kill insects and weeds, have immediate effects on the nervous system and may impair

House Cleaning the Natural Way

Use these easy household recipes to help make your home toxic-free (adapted from World Wildlife Fund)

Oven Cleaner

Clean grease with rag and vinegar. Sprinkle salt on spill. Let it sit for a few minutes, then scrape the spill and wash the area clean. For stubborn spots, use baking soda and steel wool.

Window Cleaner

½ cup vinegar
1 gallon warm water
Fill spray bottle.

Stain Remover

Soak fabrics in water mixed with borax, lemon juice, hydrogen peroxide, or white vinegar.

the brain development of children. In the rush to introduce new chemicals, we unfortunately learn about their harmful effects long after the damage is already done.

Environmental Triggers and Disease

Research by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has shown that although genetics is an important predictor of health challenges, triggers in the environment often propel a person towards disease. So, while someone may have a pre-disposition to a particular illness, the disease may never develop if not first prompted by exposure to a chemical or other environmental factor. Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to environmental contaminants. Rates of asthma and developmental problems are on the rise, as well as the incidence of cancers. Many of these chemicals are seriously jeopardizing our overall quality of life.

Stagnancy

The intended design of creation is one in which interdependence of all living things is celebrated and encouraged. The lessons of inter-dependence, both joyful and challenging, are what makes life abundant. We may eliminate our opportunity for abundant living through our reliance on synthetic chemicals. We cannot make God's Earth a wasteland of things created, used, and then discarded and still expect people or the rest of God's creation to prosper. Exposure to air pollution, water contamination, toxic substances, heavy metals, endocrine disrupters, and carcinogens turn God's cycle-of-life design into a truncated lifeline. By instead seeking safer, and more sustainable alternatives, all of us as part of God's creation can live a full, and abundant, life.

Purity as Holiness

Ridding the Earth of all pollution and toxic chemicals that trigger illness is part of the work to which we are called as stewards of creation and advocates for justice. Any effort given toward purifying the body—the Earth's, our own, and others—shows respect for the divine artist whose masterpiece is our context for living.

It is also the pursuit of holiness. God's creation, of which we are only one part, is sacred. We should

treat it with great care to ensure that the breath of life can flow rhythmically through the collective body. Our own bodies, as temples of God, need to be purged of pollution and toxic matter so that the work of God can continue and flourish in each of us. The way we move, work, and play in the world should foster creation's interdependence, where each member of creation in some way contributes to the health of the whole. In this way, creation is continually animated by the spirit of God and regularly resurrected.

In 2 Corinthians we are reminded to purify everything that contaminates body and spirit. It is not enough to lessen our contamination from pollution and toxic chemicals. We must attempt to eliminate them altogether. We must seek to find ways to live that do not endanger ourselves or others. Our waste should not accumulate in a landfill so that it poisons the land and people living nearby. Our daily living should not use or release toxic pollution or chemicals that cause environmental degradation and human illness. Rather, our lifestyles should allow God's creation and God's people to flourish.

The kind of purification that leads to resurrection requires that we know about the pollution that our life-styles create and the chemicals that are entering our bodies. Our bodies are meant to be a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:21), a temple out of which grows a pure heart. Matthew 5:8 says "blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Purity in this sense is freedom from conflicting motives; it occurs when we are motivated first and only by our love of God. Only when the spirit of God, which initially gave rise to the diverse aspects of creation, can live in us and flow through us will the whole of creation be renewed. A pure body both leads to and stems from a pure heart.

The Fruits We Bear

Every day we make choices about our daily living—from which transportation we use to what household cleaning products we choose, to our selection of lawn care products. We tend to think of these as individual decisions concerning only us, but we are called to consider how we are affecting all of creation. What impact will our actions today have on those who come after us? How will they

influence those around us? What bearing will they have on our own lives? Are they helping to purify the body and spirit of creation? If we are able to discipline ourselves to regularly ask these questions and respond to them with the intention that comes from loving God first (Luke 10:27), then our work as stewards will ensure that all of creation can experience the spirit of God flowing with each breath.

Living an Abundant Life

Life may not always be easy; but it will be abundant. Ezekiel 47:12 gives us a picture of this abundant life. It is the picture of a river flowing with water that springs forth from the sanctuary and nourishes the trees growing on both banks. The fruits of these trees are plentiful and are good for food and the leaves promote healing. Ridding ourselves and our world of the toxic chemicals upon which we have come to rely on will purify the sanctuary and allow for the love of God to “water” the Earth.

Land certified to grow organic produce makes up less than one percent of all U.S. farmland.

Farming Faithfully

Rural communities are blessed with fresh and varied produce that are not always found in urban or suburban supermarkets. However, rural farmers also face unique environmental health concerns related to food production. Many farm workers and small farmers who work with traditional farming practices are often exposed to pesticides that are harmful to human health. Studies have found higher rates of prostate cancer, breast cancer, retinal degeneration, and Parkinson’s disease among farm workers exposed to pesticides. Often these same farmers are paid low wages, guaranteed work for only a season, and receive little or no health benefits. Notably, the majority of farm workers are people of color and overwhelmingly Latino.

In June 2007, the Environmental Protection Agency released a list of known or suspected endocrine disruptors, which help control our bodily functions and development. All the chemicals on the list are pesticides.

To improve the health of small farmers and farm workers, farmers can use more sustainable farming

techniques that disrupt pests without chemicals. Consumers can also help by supporting local, organic farms that bring produce to urban farmers’ markets. As a faith community we can bring voice to the health concerns of vulnerable rural communities and encourage large corporate farms to enforce safety standards, stop the application of the most harmful pesticides, and provide health care benefits to their farm workers.

Demystifying the Chemical Alphabet Soup

It can be challenging to spell and even pronounce many of the chemicals found in our everyday lives. Understanding the impacts that these chemicals have on our bodies and communities, and then determining ways to reduce any harmful effects can be daunting. Below is a list of chemicals to particularly avoid if possible. There are safer alternatives to some of our most toxic chemicals, but we can do more.

Bisphenol-A

This chemical is commonly found in hard, clear plastic #7 bottles, table-ware, bike

helmets, aluminum cans, and dental sealants. Bisphenol-A has been known to cause cancer, hormonal changes, changes in menstruation patterns, accelerated or delayed puberty, obesity and type II diabetes in animal studies. Avoid Bisphenol-A by using stainless steel drinking bottles or #5 plastic baby bottles. Also avoid canned foods or purchase uncoated aluminum products.

Dioxins

Dioxin is a group of chlorinated chemicals found in the pulp, paper, and PVC plastic manufacturing industries. It also comes from the incineration of chlorine-containing materials. Exposure to dioxins occurs mostly by consuming fatty food, especially meat and dairy products, and the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl) products. Associated health effects include immune suppression and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde is used as a disinfectant and can be found in synthetic resins, wood, dyes, and plastics products. Sources of formaldehyde include building materials, wood products, fuel-burning

appliances, adhesives, and paints. Associated health effects include cancer and respiratory illness such as asthma.

Lead

Lead is used in building construction, paints, batteries, pipes, and other metals. Although lead has been phased out of paint and gasoline, lead still poses a significant threat to individuals, especially children and pregnant women who come in contact with lead paint in old houses. Associated health effects of lead exposure include fertility problems, cognitive impairment, developmental delay, and chronic renal disease.

Mercury

The main sources of mercury include coal-fired power plants, waste incinerators, and industrial boilers with exposure coming primarily through the consumption of fish once mercury leaves the atmosphere and enters waterways. Associated health effects of mercury exposure include birth defects, heart disease, nervous system disorders, and mental retardation. Women of child-bearing years, in particular, should avoid consuming fish, such as swordfish and king mackerel, that contains high levels of mercury.

Perfluorochemicals (PFCs)

PFCs are used for non-stick products and stain- and water-repelling substances under brand names such as Teflon, Gore-tex and Scotch-Guard. They are considered by scientists to be among the most hazardous contaminants ever produced. PFCs are found in the blood of more than 90 percent of the U.S. population, and have been linked to cancer and birth defects. In 2006, the eight largest users and producers of PFOA, a kind of PFC the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated a likely human carcinogen, signed an agreement with the EPA to virtually eliminate PFOA pollution by 2015.

Phthalate

Phthalates are synthetic chemical substances used to make plastics, like PVC (vinyl), more flexible and enable personal care products and detergents to hold scent. They are found in toothbrushes, automobile parts, toys, personal body products, and food packaging. The health effects of phthalate exposure include birth defects, hormonal changes,

and infertility. Exposure to phthalates can be reduced by avoiding microwaving food in plastic containers or wraps, and by buying unscented products. Parents should look for toys and teethingers that are “phthalate free.”

Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs)

Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs) are bromine-based chemicals used as flame retardants that can be found in household products such as computers, televisions, mobile phones, furniture, and textiles. While this chemical additive offers protection from fire, these chemicals persist in the environment and can be found in breast milk, passing from mother to infant. The health effects of PBDEs include thyroid cancer, developmental delays, and hearing loss. Many leading companies are finding innovative ways to reduce the flammability of their products without using PBDEs. Cotton and wool are both naturally fire resistant.

Safer Alternatives

The precautionary principle holds that God’s children and communities should be protected and safe from harmful chemicals. Human health is intricately linked to the health of God’s creation. The products we buy can impact the health of our bodies. “Green” chemists are working on finding safer alternatives to toxic chemicals. These safer alternatives reduce health damage and pose less of a threat to the rest of God’s creation. Safer alternatives not only protect consumers but also create healthier work places and a safer world for our children.

Notes

1. Bullard, R., Mohai, P., Saha, R., & Wright, B. (2007) *Toxic Waste and Race at Twenty (1987-2007)*. Columbus, OH: The United Church of Christ.

Social, Economic, Environmental Reading



The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity

Walter Brueggemann

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The majority of the world's resources pour into the United States. And as we Americans grow more and more wealthy, money is becoming a kind of narcotic for us. We hardly notice our own prosperity or the poverty of so many others. The great contradiction is that we have more and more money and less and less generosity—less and less public money for the needy, less charity for the neighbor.

Robert Wuthnow, sociologist of religion at Princeton University, has studied stewardship in the church and discovered that preachers do a good job of promoting stewardship. They study it, think about it, explain it well. But folks don't get it. Though many of us are well intentioned, we have invested our lives in consumerism. We have a love affair with "more"—and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.

The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis I is a song of praise for God's generosity. It tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, "It is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good." It declares that God blesses—that is, endows with vitality—the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind. And it pictures the creator as saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." In an orgy of fruitfulness, everything in its kind is to multiply the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit. And as you

know, the creation ends in Sabbath. God is so overrun with fruitfulness that God says, "I've got to take a break from all this. I've got to get out of the office."

And Israel celebrates God's abundance. Psalm 104, the longest creation poem, is a commentary on Genesis I. The psalmist surveys creation and names it all: the heavens and the earth, the waters and springs and streams and trees and birds and goats and wine and oil and bread and people and lions. This goes on for 23 verses and ends in the 24th with the psalmist's expression of awe and praise for God and God's creation. Verses 27 and 28 are something like a table prayer. They proclaim, "You give them all food in due season, you feed everybody." The psalm ends by picturing God as a great respirator. It says, "If you give your breath the world will live; if you ever stop breathing, the world will die." But the psalm makes clear that we don't need to worry. God is utterly, utterly reliable. The fruitfulness of the world is guaranteed.

Psalm 150, the last psalm in the book, is an exuberant expression of amazement at God's goodness. It just says, "Praise Yahweh, praise Yahweh with lute, praise Yahweh with trumpet, praise, praise, praise." Together, these three scriptures proclaim that God's force of life is loose in the world. Genesis 1 affirms generosity and denies scarcity. Psalm 104 celebrates the buoyancy of creation and rejects anxiety. Psalm 150 enacts abandoning oneself to God and letting go of the need to have anything under control.

Later in Genesis God blesses Abraham, Sarah and their family. God tells them to be a blessing, to bless the people of all nations. Blessing is the force of well-being active in the world, and faith is the awareness that creation is the gift that keeps on giving. That awareness dominates Genesis until its 47th chapter. In that chapter Pharaoh dreams that there will be a famine in the land. So Pharaoh gets organized to administer, control and monopolize the food supply. Pharaoh introduces the principle of scarcity into the world economy. For the first

time in the Bible, someone says, “There’s not enough. Let’s get everything.”

Martin Niemöller, the German pastor who heroically opposed Adolf Hitler, was a young man when, as part of a delegation of leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, he met with Hitler in 1933. Niemöller stood at the back of the room and looked and listened. He didn’t say anything. When he went home, his wife asked him what he had learned that day. Niemöller replied, “I discovered that Herr Hitler is a terribly frightened man.”

Because Pharaoh, like Hitler after him, is afraid that there aren’t enough good things to go around, he must try to have them all. Because he is fearful, he is ruthless. Pharaoh hires Joseph to manage the monopoly. When the crops fail and the peasants run out of food, they come to Joseph. And on behalf of Pharaoh, Joseph says, “What’s your collateral?” They give up their land for food, and then, the next year, they give up their cattle. By the third year of the famine they have no collateral but themselves. And that’s how the children of Israel become slaves—through an economic transaction.

By the end of Genesis 47 Pharaoh has all the land except that belonging to the priests, which he never touches because he needs somebody to bless him. The notion of scarcity has been introduced into biblical faith. The Book of Exodus records the contest between the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity—a contest that still tears us apart today.

The promises of the creation story continue to operate in the lives of the children of Israel. Even in captivity, the people multiply. By the end of Exodus 1 Pharaoh decides that they have become so numerous that he doesn’t want any more Hebrew babies to be born. He tells the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah (though we don’t know Pharaoh’s name, we know theirs), to kill all the newborn boys. But they don’t, and the Hebrew babies just keep popping out.

By the end of Exodus, Pharaoh has been as mean, brutal and ugly as he knows how to be—and as the myth of scarcity tends to be. Finally, he becomes so exasperated by his inability to control the people

of Israel that he calls Moses and Aaron to come to him. Pharaoh tells them, “Take your people and leave. Take your flocks and herds and just get out of here!” And then the great king of Egypt, who presides over a monopoly of the region’s resources, asks Moses and Aaron to bless him. The powers of scarcity admit to this little community of abundance, “It is clear that you are the wave of the future. So before you leave, lay your powerful hands upon us and give us energy.” The text shows that the power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolize the world’s resources; it is in the hands of those who trust God’s abundance.

When the children of Israel are in the wilderness, beyond the reach of Egypt, they still look back and think, “Should we really go? All the world’s glory is in Egypt and with Pharaoh.” But when they finally turn around and look into the wilderness, where there are no monopolies, they see the glory of Yahweh.

In answer to the people’s fears and complaints, something extraordinary happens. God’s love comes trickling down in the form of bread. They say, “*Manhue?*”—Hebrew for “What is it?”—and the word “manna” is born. They had never before received bread as a free gift that they couldn’t control, predict, plan for or own. The meaning of this strange narrative is that the gifts of life are indeed given by a generous God. It’s a wonder, it’s a miracle, it’s an embarrassment, it’s irrational, but God’s abundance transcends the market economy.

Three things happened to this bread in Exodus 16. First, everybody had enough. But because Israel had learned to believe in scarcity in Egypt, people started to hoard the bread. When they tried to bank it, to invest it, it turned sour and rotted, because you cannot store up God’s generosity. Finally, Moses said, “You know what we ought to do? We ought to do what God did in Genesis 1. We ought to have a Sabbath.” Sabbath means that there’s enough bread, that we don’t have to hustle every day of our lives. There’s no record that Pharaoh ever took a day off. People who think their lives consist of struggling to get more and more can never slow down because they won’t ever have enough.

When the people of Israel cross the Jordan River into the promised land the manna stops coming. Now they can and will have to grow their food. Very soon Israel suffers a terrible defeat in battle and Joshua conducts an investigation to find out who or what undermined the war effort. He finally traces their defeat to a man called A'chan, who stole some of the spoils of battle and withheld them from the community. Possessing land, property and wealth makes people covetous, the Bible warns.

We who are now the richest nation are today's main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity.

The conflict between the narratives of abundance and of scarcity is the defining problem confronting us at the turn of the millennium. The gospel story of abundance asserts that we originated in the magnificent, inexplicable love of a God who loved the world into generous being. The baptismal service declares that each of us has been miraculously loved into existence by God. And the story of abundance says that our lives will end in God, and that this well-being cannot be taken from us. In the words of St. Paul, neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor things—nothing can separate us from God.

What we know about our beginnings and our endings, then, creates a different kind of present tense for us. We can live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for.

But if you are like me, while you read the Bible you keep looking over at the screen to see how the market is doing. If you are like me, you read the Bible on a good day, but you watch Nike ads every day. And the Nike story says that our beginnings

are in our achievements, and that we must create ourselves. My wife and I have some young friends who have a four-year-old son. Recently the mother told us that she was about to make a crucial decision. She had to get her son into the right kindergarten because if she didn't, then he wouldn't get into the right prep school. And that would mean not being able to get into Davidson College. And if he didn't go to school there he wouldn't be connected to the bankers in Charlotte and be able to get the kind of job where he would make a lot of money. Our friends' story is a kind of a parable of our notion that we must position ourselves because we must achieve, and build our own lives.

According to the Nike story, whoever has the most shoes when he dies, wins. The Nike story says there are no gifts to be given because there's no giver. We end up only with whatever we manage to get for ourselves. This story ends in despair. It gives us a present tense of anxiety, fear, greed and brutality. It produces child and wife abuse, indifference to the poor, the buildup of armaments, divisions between people, and environmental racism. It tells us not to care about anyone but ourselves—and it is the prevailing creed of American society.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if liberal and conservative church people, who love to quarrel with each other, came to a common realization that the real issue confronting us is whether the news of God's abundance can be trusted in the face of the story of scarcity? What we know in the secret recesses of our hearts is that the story of scarcity is a tale of death. And the people of God counter this tale by witnessing to the manna. There is a more excellent bread than crass materialism. It is the bread of life and you don't have to bake it. As we walk into the new millennium, we must decide where our trust is placed.

The great question now facing the church is whether our faith allows us to live in a new way. If we choose the story of death, we will lose the land—to excessive chemical fertilizer, or by pumping out the water table for irrigation, perhaps. Or maybe we'll only lose it at night, as going out after dark becomes more and more dangerous.

Joshua 24 puts the choice before us. Joshua begins by reciting the story of God's generosity, and he concludes by saying, "I don't know about you, but I and my house will choose the Lord." This is not a church-growth text. Joshua warns the people that this choice will bring them a bunch of trouble. If they want to be in on the story of abundance, they must put away their foreign gods—I would identify them as the gods of scarcity.

Jesus said it more succinctly. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God and do what you please with your money or your sex or your land. And then he says, "Don't be anxious, because everything you need will be given to you." But you must decide. Christians have a long history of trying to squeeze Jesus out of public life and reduce him to a private little Savior. But to do this is to ignore what the Bible really says. Jesus talks a great deal about the kingdom of God—and what he means by that is a public life reorganized toward neighborliness.

As a little child Jesus must often have heard his mother, Mary, singing. And as we know, she sang a revolutionary song, the Magnificat—the anthem of Luke's Gospel. She sang about neighborliness: about how God brings down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly; about how God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty. Mary did not make up this dangerous song. She took it from another mother, Hannah, who sang it much earlier to little Samuel, who became one of ancient Israel's greatest revolutionaries. Hannah, Mary, and their little boys imagined a great social transformation. Jesus enacted his mother's song well. Everywhere he went he broke the vicious cycles of poverty, bondage, fear and death; he healed, transformed, empowered and brought new life. Jesus' example gives us the mandate to transform our public life.

Telling parables was one of Jesus' revolutionary activities, for parables are subversive re-imagining of reality. The ideology devoted to encouraging consumption wants to shrivel our imaginations so that we cannot conceive of living in any way that would be less profitable for the dominant corporate structures. But Jesus tells us that we can change the world. The Christian community performs a vital service by keeping the parables

alive. These stories haunt us and push us in directions we never thought we would go.

Performing what the Bible calls "wonders and signs" was another way in which Jesus enacted his mother's song. These signs—or miracles—may seem odd to us, but in fact they are the typical gifts we receive when the world gets organized and placed under the sovereignty of God. Everywhere Jesus goes the world is rearranged: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are freed from debt. The forgiveness of debts is the hardest thing to do—harder even than raising the dead to life. Jesus left ordinary people dazzled, amazed, and grateful; he left powerful people angry and upset, because every time he performed a wonder, they lost a little of their clout. The wonders of the new age of the coming of God's kingdom may scandalize and upset us. They dazzle us, but they also make us nervous. The people of God need pastoral help in processing this ambivalent sense of both deeply yearning for God's new creation and deeply fearing it.

The feeding of the multitudes, recorded in Mark's Gospel, is an example of the new world coming into being through God. When the disciples, charged with feeding the hungry crowd, found a child with five loaves and two fishes, Jesus *took, blessed, broke* and *gave* the bread. These are the four decisive verbs of our sacramental existence. Jesus conducted a Eucharist, a gratitude. He demonstrated that the world is filled with abundance and freighted with generosity. If bread is broken and shared, there is enough for all. Jesus is engaged in the sacramental, subversive reordering of public reality.

The profane is the opposite of the sacramental. "Profane" means flat, empty, one-dimensional, exhausted. The market ideology wants us to believe that the world is profane—life consists of buying and selling, weighing, measuring and trading, and then finally sinking down into death and nothingness. But Jesus presents an entirely different kind of economy, one infused with the mystery of abundance and a cruciform kind of generosity. Five thousand are fed and 12 baskets of food are left over—one for every tribe of Israel.

Jesus transforms the economy by blessing it and breaking it beyond self-interest. From broken Friday bread comes Sunday abundance. In this and in the following account of a miraculous feeding in Mark, people do not grasp, hoard, resent, or act selfishly; they watch as the juices of heaven multiply the bread of earth. Jesus reaffirms Genesis 1.

When people forget that Jesus is the bread of the world, they start eating junk food—the food of the Pharisees and of Herod, the bread of moralism and of power. Too often the church forgets the true bread and is tempted by junk food. Our faith is not just about spiritual matters; it is about the transformation of the world. The closer we stay to Jesus, the more we will bring a new economy of abundance to the world. The disciples often don't get what Jesus is about because they keep trying to fit him into old patterns—and to do so makes him innocuous, irrelevant and boring. But Paul gets it.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul directs a stewardship campaign for the early church and presents Jesus as the new economist. Though Jesus was rich, Paul says, “yet for your sakes he became poor, that by his poverty you might become rich.” We say it takes money to make money. Paul says it takes poverty to produce abundance. Jesus gave himself to enrich others, and we should do the same. Our abundance and the poverty of others need to be brought into a new balance. Paul ends his stewardship letter by quoting Exodus 16: “And the one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” The citation is from the story of the manna that transformed the wilderness into abundance.

It is, of course, easier to talk about these things than to live them. Many people both inside and outside of the church haven't a clue that Jesus is talking about the economy. We haven't taught them that he is. But we must begin to do so now, no matter how economically compromised we may feel. Our world absolutely requires this news. It has nothing to do with being Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, socialists or capitalists. It is much more elemental: the creation is infused with the Creator's generosity, and we can find practices, procedures and institutions that

allow that generosity to work. Like the rich young man in Mark 10, we all have many possessions. Sharing our abundance may, as Jesus says, be impossible for mortals, but nothing is impossible for God. None of us knows what risks God's spirit may empower us to take. Our faith, ministry and hope at the turn of the millennium are that the Creator will empower us to trust his generosity, so that bread may abound.

Greening Parishes Reading



Passion for God, Passion for the Earth

Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ

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The image of our planet Earth from space, a blue marble swirling with white clouds, has become familiar to this generation. Astronauts whose own eyes have seen this view speak of its power to change their deepest feelings and attitudes toward the world. Saudi Arabian astronaut Sultan bin Salman al-Saud, part of an international crew, recollected, “The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were all aware of *only* one Earth.” Another astronaut, American Rusty Schweigert, who walked on the moon, had this to say: “From the moon, earth is so small and so fragile and such a precious little spot in the universe that you can block it out with your thumb. Then you realize that on that spot, that beautiful warm blue and white circle, is everything that means anything to you—all of nature and history, music, poetry and art, birth and love and death, tears, joy, prayer, dancing—all of it right there in that little spot that you can cover with your thumb. And then you are changed forever. Your relationship to the world is no longer what it was.”¹

In truth, these are religious experiences. On the brink of the third millennium, a new awareness of planet Earth as one community of life is growing among peoples everywhere. But this appreciation is marked by strong paradox: the more we discern how precious all life on Earth is, the more we also realize alarmingly how human actions are ravaging and exhausting the natural world.

Thus the spiritual/ethical question of our right relation with Earth emerges as a new, vitally important issue, one that encompasses all others, including relationship with God and peaceful justice among humans.

Signs of the Earth’s Times

The critical nature of this question becomes clearer as we fill in the concrete content of our wonder and wasting.

Wonder. The new creation story, which is the tale told by contemporary science of how the world came into being, teaches us that the world is unimaginably old, large, dynamic, and organic. When filtered through the eyes of faith, it reveals a Creator Spirit initiating, upholding, moving, vivifying, and playing in a world that grows increasingly bright and complex—truly the Giver of Life. Fifteen billion years ago the universe began. More than one hundred billion galaxies, each with a billion-plus stars, make up its size. Roughly five billion years ago an aging star died in a great supernova explosion that spewed its debris into the cosmos. Some of this cloud of dust and gas reignited to become our sun, a second-generation star. Some of it coalesced in chunks too small to catch fire, forming the planets of our solar system, including Earth. Thomas Berry calls this ancient, exploding star our Mother Star, our sacrificial Christ Star, because in its death it gave itself up so that we might live.

Out of the Big Bang came the stars, out of the stardust the Earth. Then, out of the molecules of the Earth emerged single-celled living creatures, setting off a new kind of explosion, life. From the evolutionary life and death of these creatures flowed an advancing tide of life, fragile but unstoppable: single-celled plankton, jellyfish, creatures that live in shells, amphibians, insects, flowers, birds, reptiles, mammals, among whom emerged human beings with a consciousness and freedom that concentrate the self-transcendence of matter itself. If the inelegantly named Big Bang exploded on January 1, then our sun and planets

came into existence September 10, and human beings came on the scene on December 31 at ten minutes to midnight. This story of evolution makes evident that humans are recently arrived kin to all other living creatures on our planet, sharing with them a common ancestry. Bacteria, pine trees, blueberries, horses, the great gray whales—we are all genetic relatives in the great community of life. And we are all part of the larger universe. The blood of humans and other mammals is red and our teeth white because iron and calcium were produced in a galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron and calcium in the crust of the Earth from which we have all materialized. Everything is connected with everything else; nothing conceivable is isolated.

Telling the story of creation this way leads to three insights. First, we realize that human beings are not pilgrims or strangers on this Earth merely passing through; rather, we belong here—we are “earthlings” to use Sallie McFague’s expression, part and parcel of our home planet.² Second, while the Earth does have instrumental value for human use, we realize that it is more than just a stage or backdrop for the human drama of redemption; rather, it is a marvelous creation in its own right, loved by God for itself, saved by Christ, destined for eternal life in the new creation. It has its own intrinsic value. Third, since amid the whole web of life human beings are the ones consciously aware of the Holy One who created everything we have a unique distinction and responsibility. In Abraham Heschel’s words, human beings are the cantors of the universe.

Waste. While we wonder at this new knowledge of the world and our place in it, however, we damage the world at an accelerating pace. In our day the human race is inflicting deadly damage on the life systems that keep this planet a habitat for life. The twin engines of destruction are, overconsumption and overpopulation. Consumerism is the way people of the postindustrial world are wrecking the planet. Every year 20 percent of Earth’s people in the rich nations use 75 percent of the world’s resources and produce 80 percent of the world’s waste. An example: Chicago, with three million people, consumes as much raw in a year as Bangladesh, with ninety-seven million people.

Such overconsumption on our part is driven by an economy that must constantly grow in order to be viable. Its greatest goal is a bottom line in the black without counting the ecological cost. At the same time, overpopulation is a problem in developing nations. The statistics speak for themselves. In 1950 the world numbered two billion people; now at the turn of the millennium it numbers six billion; and by the year 2030 there will be ten billion persons on the planet. Think of it this way: the Earth’s population will have multiplied five times during the lifetime of someone born in 1950. To translate these statistics into a vivid image: another Mexico City is added every sixty days; another Brazil joins the planet every year.

The carrying capacity of Earth is being exhausted by this growth. Our species now uses up resources faster than Earth’s power to replenish itself. This assault on the planet, intended or not, wreaks ecological damage of great magnitude: hole in the ozone layer, clear cut forests, drained wetlands, denuded soils, polluted air, poisoned rivers and lakes. Appallingly, widespread destruction of ecosystems has as its flip side the extinction of the lives that thrive in these habitats. By a conservative estimate, in the last quarter of the twentieth century 20 percent of all living species have gone extinct. When these living beings, these magnificent plants and animals, go extinct, they never come back again. We are killing birth itself, wiping out the future of our fellow creatures who took millions of years to evolve. We live in a time of a great dying off.

On the one hand, we gaze in wonder at the world; on the other hand, we are wasting the world. These are signs of our Earth’s times and should be filled with meaning for people of faith. But the odd thing is that, with some notable exceptions, many religious people and the church as a whole are curiously silent about the Earth. We are like the disciples asleep in the garden of Gethsemane while Earth undergoes its passion and death.

Responses in the Spirit

In spiritual terms, what this time calls for is nothing less than a conversion of our minds and hearts to the good of the Earth. Catholic Christians need to unlearn the dualism that led us to pit the

spirit against matter and caused us to pursue paths of holiness marked “flee the world.” We need to learn to relate anew to the natural world not as dominators, not even as stewards—which does not go far enough—but as real kin in the one creation of God. Our human lives are interwoven with millions of other species in a great community of life. How we pray and live responsibly in this community will determine whether life on this planet has a glorious or miserable future. The very glory of God is at stake.

There are at least three spiritual responses to Earth’s crisis: the sacramental or contemplative, the ascetic, and the prophetic. Each is important; they can be combined in different ways; together they will enable us to develop the virtue of “earthkeeping.”³

The *sacramental* response gazes contemplatively on the world with the eyes of love rather than with an arrogant, utilitarian stare, and sees there the handiwork of God. Not only is the evolutionary world created by the power and imagination of Holy Wisdom, but it also participates in the goodness of Divine Being. Moreover, in the incarnation God chose to unite with the material of Earth in a profoundly personal way. The resurrection of the crucified Jesus transforms a piece of this Earth, real to the core, into glory in God’s eternal presence. This pledges a joyful future beyond death for all people along with the Earth itself, Christ being the firstborn of all creation. Now the humble, earthy materials of bread and wine offer communion in the very body of God.

Seen in this way, the sacramental character of Earth becomes clear. Sacramental theology has always taught that simple material things—bread, wine, water, oil, the embodied sexual relationship of marriage—can be bearers of divine grace. We now realize that this is so only because to begin with the Earth with all its creatures is the original sacrament. “Charged with the glory of God,” as poet Gerard Manley Hopkins penned, the world with its beauties and terrors makes present the loving power of the Creator whose image it reflects. This response takes delight in the intricate and powerful workings of nature for their own sake, standing with scientist Louis

Agassiz, who said, “I spent the summer traveling; I got half-way across my back yard.” At the same time, the eyes of faith appreciate that the natural world itself is a primary matrix that reveals and makes God present. Praise and thanks in personal prayer, community liturgy, and church-wide celebrations such as a Creation Sunday are apt responses.

The *ascetic* response calls for intellectual humility in our assessment of the human place in the universe and practical discipline in our use of natural resources. The true purpose of asceticism has always been to make us fully alive to the movement of grace in our lives and the movement of the Spirit in the world. It does so by removing what blocks our sensitivity to divine power and presence. An ecological asceticism works to restore right relations between humankind and otherkind distorted by hubris and greed.

Rather than the medieval construct of the hierarchy of being and honor ascending from the pebble to the peach to the poodle to the person, all under the sway of the monarchical God at the apex, asceticism reconfigures that pyramid into a circle of life with human beings thoroughly interwoven with all other creatures, special in virtue of being conscious and free but utterly interdependent on others for their life. This new paradigm that defines human beings as members of Earth’s community sets off an earthquake in traditional theological anthropology that overprivileged humans. When coupled with a theology of the all-pervading Creator Spirit of God who does not rule in a patriarchal way but vivifies and lures, this view charts a path down from our selfish pedestal toward partnership with Earth’s God-given power of life.

There are also new ways to engage in traditional practices of fasting, retreats, sojourns in the wilderness, almsgiving, and use of material things that honor their ecological reality. We do these things not to make ourselves suffer and not because we’re anti-body, but to become alert to how enslaved we are by the marketplace and its pro-motion of greed. Our economy is structured to make us overconsume, with dire effects upon the Earth. This is such a deep structural power that we are barely conscious of it—as if it were one of

the principalities and powers ruling the world. An “Earth-sensuous asceticism” that is part of an “Earth-affirming spirituality” is one response that sets us on the path of virtue. The religious vow of poverty itself is refreshed in this light.

The *prophetic* response moves us to action on behalf of justice for the Earth. A moral universe limited to the human community no longer serves the future of life. If the Earth is indeed creation, a sacrament of the glory of God with its own intrinsic value, then for Christians, ongoing destruction of Earth bears the marks of deep sinfulness. Its bringing violent disfigurement and ongoing death evokes the prophetic response, with its ethical demands for care, protection, and restoration. Indeed, the impulse to care for the Earth, to heal and redeem it, takes on the character of a moral imperative. One stringent criterion must now measure the morality of our actions: whether or not these contribute to a sustainable Earth community.

Undergirding this ethic is a startling idea: we need to extend vigorous moral consideration to the nonhuman community of Earth. We need to respect life and resist the culture of death not only among humankind but also among other living creatures. In such ethical reflection, the great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is extended to include all members of the community. “Who is my neighbor?” asks Brian Patrick. He answers, “The Samaritan? The outcast? The enemy? Yes, yes, of course. But it is also the whale, the dolphin, and the rain forest. Our neighbor is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it all as our very self.” All of the lessons that Christianity teaches about concern for the poor and oppressed now become inclusive of the natural world. The common good now includes the Earth and all living creatures in addition to humans. We need to repent of our ill treatment of nonhumans. If nature is the new poor, then we must extend the preferential option for the poor to other species. We must widen compassionate solidarity with victims and action on behalf of justice to include not only suffering human beings but also life systems and other species. “Save the rain forest” becomes a concrete moral application of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” The moral goal is to ensure vibrant

life in community for all.

This in turn requires us to realize the deep connections between social injustice and ecological devastation. Economic poverty coincides with ecological poverty, for as liberation theologies have argued, the poor suffer disproportionately from environmental destruction.⁴ Examples abound. In developing countries the onset of economic development for corporate profit brings deforestation, soil erosion, and polluted waters, which in turn lead to the disruption of local cycles of nature and the sustenance economies on which most poor people depend. Sheer human misery results. Again, lack of land reform pushes dispossessed rural peoples to the edges of cultivated land, where in order to stay alive they practice slash-and-burn agriculture, in the process destroying pristine habitat, killing rare animals, and displacing indigenous peoples. To give a North American example, U.S. companies export work to factories across the Mexican border (*maquiladoras*) that cheaply employ thousands of young, rural women to make high quality consumer goods for export, while they live in unhealthy squalor in an environment spoiled by toxic waste. Ecofeminist theology is replete with other examples of how “the rape of the Earth” and the violation of women’s bodies are connected as expressions of patriarchal domination of the life-givers.⁵

In a global perspective, these conditions result from an inter-national economic system driven by profit. Its inner logic makes it prey without ceasing on nature’s resources and seek cheap labor to turn these resources into consumer products. And in wealthy countries, too, ecological injustice runs through the social fabric. The economically well-off can choose to live amid acres of green while poor people are housed near factories, refineries, or waste-processing plants that heavily pollute the environment. Birth defects, general ill health, and disease result. The bitterness of this situation is exacerbated by racial prejudice, as environmental racism pressures people of color to dwell in these neighborhoods.

In sum, social injustice has an ecological face. Ravaging of people and of the land go hand in hand. To be truly effective, therefore, prophetic

action must not pit issues of social justice against issues of ecological health, but must include commitment to ecological wholeness within the struggle for a more just social order. We all share the status of creature; we are all kin in the evolving community of life now under siege; our vision of justice must be one of cosmic justice. The aim is to establish and protect healthy ecosystems where all living creatures can flourish.

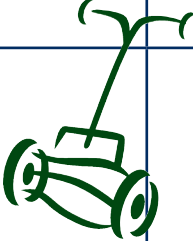
Conclusion

A flourishing humanity on a thriving Earth in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God—such is the theological vision and praxis we are being called to in this critical age of Earth's distress. We need to appreciate all over again that Earth is a sacrament, vivified by the living Spirit of God. We need to realize that the way we are destroying it is tantamount to a sacrilege. And we need to act as members of the Earth community called to be partners with God in the ongoing creation rather than destruction of the world. This moment of crisis calls for a spirituality and ethics that will empower us to live in the web of life as sustainers rather than destroyers of the world. Ignoring this view keeps the church and its members locked into fatal irrelevance while the great drama is being played out in the actual wider world. But being converted to the Earth sets us who are the church and our ministries off on a great spiritual, intellectual, and moral adventure. Instead of living as thoughtless or greedy exploiters, we, by conversion to the Earth, are empowered to rediscover our kinship and live as sisters and brothers, friends and lovers, mothers and fathers, priests and prophets, co-creators and children of the Earth as God's good creation gives us life. This is our generation's great religious adventure, which is absolutely a matter of life or death. No more monumental challenge faces those who are led by the Spirit of God at the start of the third millennium.

Notes

1. See Michael Dowd, *Earthspirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), for these Earth quotations.
2. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis- Fortress Press, 1993).
3. Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.-Orbis Books, 1996). This book is filled with insight taken from church experience.
4. See David Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994); Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, eds., *Ecology and Poverty* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995).
5. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

Eco-Calendar

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Insulate doors & windows with weather stripping	Turn down thermostat 	Purchase Energy Star appliances	Unplug appliances when not in use	Insulate water heater & set thermostat no higher than 120°	Wash clothing in cold water 	Clean dryer lint screen & don't overload the dryer
Come up with own idea 	Replace light bulbs with CFLs. Recycle at Home Depot	Invest in green power, buy carbon credits	Buy local produce	Eat less beef	Use recycled products	Consider taking a local vacation
Come up with own idea	Drive the speed limit	Maintain automobile. Keep tires inflated & change oil	Walk or bike instead of driving 	Use a car cooperative like Flexcar	Carpool to work	Work from home
Come up with own idea 	Use public transportation	Switch to a more fuel efficient car	Try boating with oars or sails	Use muscle-powered landscaping tools	Contact senators & representatives to advocate for the environment	Find out what city is doing to reduce green house emissions
Get involved in an environmental organization	Share what you know about reducing global warming with a neighbor	Come up with own idea				

Footnotes & Resources

Universe Story: A Sacred Journey

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1. *An Amazing Journey! The Universe and Me*, Session II, p. 24-25
2. Adapted, Brian Swimme, *Born with a Bang*, p. 45; Michael Dowd, *An Amazing Journey! The Universe and Me*, Session I, p. 11, Epilogue, p. 4

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The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community, David Korten, 2006

The Great Work, Thomas Berry, 1999

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Mammals Who Morph: The Universe Tells Our Evolution Story, 2006

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2. BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/7010522.stm>
3. *Yes! Magazine*, Spring, 2008, p. 50

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4. Polaris Institute, www.insidethebottle.org
5. Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, www.devp.org
6. www.freedrinkingwater.com/water_quality/quality1/1-europe-water-quality-issues.htm
7. *Ibid*
8. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, www.uusc.org
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2. Environmental Working Group, www.ewg.org
3. Toxics Release Inventory, www.epa.gov/tri
4. *The Next Efficiency Revolution: Creating a Sustainable Materials Economy*, John Young & Aaron Sachs, Worldwatch Institute, 1994, pg. 13
5. Scorecard: The Pollution Info Site, www.scorecard.org
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8. *Toxic Factories Take Toll on China's Labor Force*, The Wall Street Journal, 1/15/08
9. *Environmental Justice for All*, Co-op America Quarterly, No. 73, Fall 2007, www.coopamerica.org

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Greening Parishes: Care for Creation

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1. Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Ethics, USSCB, www.webofcreation.org/DenominationalStatements/catholic.htm
2. *Plenty: The World in Green*, Aug/Sept 2008
3. www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=sb_success.sb_successstories_georgetown
4. www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/resources/education.shtml

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Ecology At The Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth, Denis Edwards, 2006

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From Stockholm to Johannesburg: A Historical Overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment 1972-2002, Majorie Keenan, RSHM, Vatican City, 2002

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The Green Book, Rogers and Kostigen, 2007

The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion, Barbara Brown Taylor, 2002

USCCB Environmental Justice Program: *Caring for God's Creation*, www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/index.shtml

Web of Creation: Ecology Resources to Transform Faith and Society, www.webofcreation.org

Care for All of Creation is a wonderful resource for parishes wishing to become more involved in exploring the connection between our faith and care for Earth. Whether you are new to the issues of environmental justice, or are already a committed environmentalist, you will find in this resource an invitation to take your concern for Earth to a much deeper spiritual level. I highly recommend it!

—Patty Bowman, Director of Social Outreach—St. James Cathedral

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—Margaret Ames, Teacher—Archbishop Thomas Murphy High School

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—Steve Wodzanowski, Deacon/Pastoral Associate—St. Joseph Parish

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- ∞ Use with a parish or community small group during a liturgical season
- ∞ Begin a committee or staff meeting using a reading, reflection, or ritual
- ∞ Create an adult education program or series using the booklets
- ∞ Use a quote, reading or group process in the classroom
- ∞ Invite high school students to form a group and do the process as part of a class project
- ∞ Consider inviting a few companions from your work or neighborhood to join you in using one or all six sessions
- ∞ Use the process as a follow up to JustFaith,

RCIA, or other program where a community has been formed

- ∞ Put a fact or statistic in the bulletin or on a bulletin board
- ∞ Gather a cross-generational group to share the process together

As Individuals

- ∞ Use the booklets for personal education and reflection
- ∞ Invite people with whom you live, work or go to school to join you in a reflection and action process on Care for Creation
- ∞ Invite one other person to come together with you to share one or all six of the topics

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