

## **GREEN CONGREGATIONS – A GROWING MOVEMENT**

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Catholic Bishops and leaders of many other faith traditions have talk about care for the earth as a moral responsibility. That call is often supported by Scripture where all of creation is seen as a gift to be protected for the benefit of all. Often the earth has been abused and misused for profit and gain, especially in our western culture.

Degrading the environment is not just an environmental issue. It is a moral imperative of our faith. The gifts of creation are not meant to be bought and sold or exploited for profit and personal gain, not for our greed but to meet our needs. The one who suffer the most as a result of such abuse are the poorest around us and even those far away from us.

Caring for the earth is not something we just think about on Earth Day celebrated each year but must be a concern every day of the year. Pope John Paul II emphasized the need to come to grips with how many of our habits can lead to ecological disaster. Climate change affects the poorest around the world. It calls us evaluate our lifestyles and make needed changes in our wasteful habits, our over consumption and use of goods that contaminate water and leave millions without safe water to drink. Fr. Pete Henriot, SJ, in a recent talk in the US, tells us that climate is a sign of the times that calls us to deep reflection and conversion. It will call for substantial changes in lifestyles and industrial patterns.

Care for the environment is not an option . It is an integral part of our lives, which are all interconnected. It calls us to concern for the entire human family, especially the poor who experience the worst adverse effects of global warming.

What can congregations and faith communities do to address this issue? Five years ago, the Racine Dominican Sisters established an Eco-Justice Center. It is dedicated to environmental education and care of the earth. The Center demonstrates sustainable, simple living in the context of community, contemplation, creativity and cultivation. The Center is located on a 15-acre site that includes wetland, woodland, pasture, gardens, outbuilding, an "Education Station," and a residence for the community of sisters who live and work at the Eco-Justice Center. Youth and adults experience hands-on learning as they participate in day camps, field trips, education programs, workshops and volunteer activities. Organic gardening, raising Araucana

chickens, geese, ducks and caring for alpacas are some ways those at the Eco-Justice Center live in harmony with Earth. Visitors have the opportunity to touch the natural world and develop a deeper appreciation and respect for our Earth's precious resources. Thousands of children and adults have visited the Center and learned about ways to care for the earth. The Center also has a hermitage where adults can come to rest, relax and reflect on the beauty of creation.

Other ways faith communities can respond are these:

- Pastors and leaders can preach and teach about care for the earth as a requirement of our faith.
- Establish groups to learn about environmental issues and care for the earth, needed lifestyle changes, reducing wastefulness, recycling and the possibility of establishing a green congregation.
- Join with other local congregations who have an interest in the movement.
- Share everyday examples of green living such as using washable dishes instead of paper products, exploring other energy sources, minimizing use of pesticides and fertilizers use of biodegradable cups and dishes.
- Do an energy audit on building owned by the congregation, explore the use of fluorescent lights, and make necessary changes when and where possible .
- Shop for and use organic fruits and vegetables.
- Participate in clean up endeavors and recycling drives.
- Teach children, even at a very young age what it means to care for the environment. Adults could study a book on the subject.
- Share ideas about what can be done to reduce wastefulness.

We are all called to respect and care for all of creation – God's gift to us to be enjoyed and used wisely for the benefit of all. We can all continue to study this topic, make needed lifestyle changes, and invite others to do the same.