



Matthew 25

*...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,
you did for me.*

The Social Ministry Commission Newsletter
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

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To Have Peace, Protect the Earth

By Jenny Torres, St. Mary's student and member of the Social Ministry Commission

"Today the subject of development is also closely related to the duties arising from our relationship to the natural environment. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. . . Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other". (Pope Benedict XVI in Caritas in Veritate, 2009)

The Catholic Church has increasingly been promoting environmental justice through papal encyclicals, pastoral letters and other communications for many years. These eye-opening documents remind us of our relationship with the environment, our fellow brothers and sisters, and most importantly with God. In 1963, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII promoted the universal common good and the need for its safeguard. In 1967, in *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI called for action to respect the universal purpose of created things and promote the integral human development to achieve peace. Pope John Paul II, in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, stated that nature must be considered in development. He urged us again in his 1990 message for World Peace Day (*Peace with God the Creator, Peace with Creation*) and in his 2002 declaration on the Environment (signed with Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople) to better respect nature thus developing a more peaceful society for the future of the world's children. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also called us "to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation" in light of Catholic Social Teaching in

their 1991 pastoral statement *Renewing the Earth*. More recently Pope Benedict XVI in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* and his 2010 message for World Peace Day

The ecological crisis is a moral issue... Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation... we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations. (Pope John Paul II in his 1990 World Peace day Message)

*In most countries today, including our own, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness... Too often, the structure of sacrifice involved in environmental remedies seems to exact a high price from the poor and from workers...[they] shoulder much of the weight of economic adjustment. (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Renewing the Earth*, 1991)*

repeated the urgent appeal: "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."

In this day and age whenever you open up a newspaper, turn on the TV or even log on to Facebook, issues affecting the environment are front page news. With all the recent developments, improving ecological problems cannot be ignored by any generation. There are so many different steps that individuals and communities can take in order to encourage the preservation of the Earth's natural resources and make a difference around the world, from changes around the house to changes in life styles.

Many of us always grew up with the saying Reuse, Reduce, Recycle (the three R's); so is that all it really takes to go green? Many people have their own definition of going green, but the most generally accepted definition means becoming more

environmentally conscious, being concerned about global warming, pollution, loss of animal habitats, animal extinction, and other very important issues that the Earth faces today. There are many different approaches on how to make this earth a better place. All you have to do is to begin by a few small changes to go green and the three R's are a good start.

"I would advocate the adoption of a model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed life-style, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow." (Pope Benedict XVI in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message, "If You Want To Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation")

Some issues affecting the globe as a whole

- Only 1% of Chinese citizens breathe air that is considered safe by the European Union and pollution spreads as far as the west coast of the U.S.
- Statistics from the World Health Organization show that the 18 million residents of Cairo, Egypt breathe air pollution that is compared with smoking 20 cigarettes a day.
- Pollution of fresh water (drinking water) is a problem for about half of the world's population. Each year there are about 250 million cases of water-related diseases, with roughly 5 to 10 million deaths.
- Desertification is a reality, caused by a variety of factors, ranging from climatic factors (minor) to human degradation of arable land areas. Overgrazing, collection of firewood and reduction of biodiversity eliminate plants that help bind the soil and encourage erosion. An estimated 2.6 billion people, almost 40% of the world's population, are either currently experiencing desertification, or are on the brink of being overrun by it.

Some issues affecting the US

- Everyday Americans produce enough trash to equal the weight of the Empire State Building.
- There are enough trucks filled with garbage in the US that in two years they would form a line long enough to reach the moon.
- Not all trash makes it to the landfill. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a vortex of trash in the Pacific Ocean, covers the area twice the size of the continental U.S. and is believed to hold almost 100 million tons of garbage!
- According to the US-EPA, emissions from power plants contribute to over 2,800 lung cancer deaths and 38,200 heart attacks annually in the US.

What others are doing about it

Since 1993 the Environmental Justice Program (EJP) from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) calls Catholics to a deeper respect for God's creation and engages parishes in activities that deal with environmental problems, particularly as they affect the poor. (www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/)

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change was launched in 2006 to help the USCCB and the Catholic community address the moral issues of climate change and provide resources for education and action ideas. (www.catholicsandclimatechange.org)

This past month during all the campaigning for Presidents and Yell Leaders at Texas A&M, a proposal for the Aggie Green Fund raising the student fees by \$3 a semester to support environmental sustainability on campus passed with 57% of the votes from the students.

The cities of College Station and Bryan have programs for recycling and disposal of hazardous household waste, and tips on how to go green. (www.cstx.gov/index.aspx?page=3186, www.bryantx.gov/departments/?name=environmental)



What can you do

Learn about the environmental issues, their impacts & the principles of our faith by visiting these websites: www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml, www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp, www.catholicsandclimatechange.org. The documents from the Popes or the US Bishops cited in this newsletter can be found on www.usccb.org. Help by sharing what you have learned with your friends and family.

Act by making some changes in your life: chose a location close to work or school to minimize travel time and walk, ride your bike, or take mass transit to lessen the use of gasoline; take your hazardous waste to a Bryan recycling center or use the curb side recycling pick up if you live in College Station; buy a water filtration system and a reusable container instead of water bottles and install water efficient showerheads and faucets in your apartment or home, or petition for their installation if you live in a dorm; unplug all electrical chargers when not in use, they still use up electricity when plugged in; buy your vegetables at local farmers markets, requiring less energy to deliver vegetables; and do not forget to reuse, reduce and recycle!

Mark your calendar to attend an inspiring Social Justice Talk on Thursday April 15 after daily mass at 6:30 PM in the Student Center. Our guest speaker, Matthew Manint, will speak about serving the poor and the homeless while living a consecrated life according to the spirituality of Blessed Charles de Foucauld with vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Matthew will talk about the consecrated life and the challenges and joys of loving the poor in Biloxi, Mississippi, a city not only devastated by Hurricane Katrina, but located in the poorest state in the union.

Join Matthew Manint, the sisters of the Apostles of the Interior Life and some members of the Social Ministry Commission for **a day trip to Casa Juan Diego, a Catholic Worker House in Houston on Sunday April 18**, contact Clotilde Pichon at cpichon@aggiecatholic.org or 846-5717 to RSVP or for more information.