Catholic Perspectives on Earth Day

April 22, 2014

I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of good will: Let us be protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

Pope Francis, Inauguration, March 2013

The goods of the earth are gifts from God. We have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. Christians should be guided both by concern for the welfare of others and by respect for the intrinsic worth and beauty of God's environment and all his creatures.

New York State Catholic Conference, *Pursuing Justice*, 2012

"*What You Can Do:* Contact the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change for suggestions on action needed at the local, state, national, and global levels. Learn more about climate change by checking the websites of the National Academy of Sciences (www.nationalacademies.org) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (www.ipcc.ch.).*"*
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Environmental Justice Program, 2014

Join Catholic individuals, families, parishes, and organizations across the country who have taken the **Saint Francis Pledge** to Care for Creation and the Poor.

"I/We pledge to:

> **Pray** and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.

> **Learn** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.

> **Assess** how we—as individuals and in our families, parishes, and other affiliations—contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.

> **Act** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.

> **Advocate** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor or vulnerable."

Register your pledge and learn more at **www.CatholicClimateCovenant.org**

**Prepared by the Commission on Peace and Justice
of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, New York**

Protect all of nature—not only human life but also animals, plant life, our soil and water, and the air we breathe. Use only what is needed to maintain a moderate standard of living. (Americans, Western Europeans, and other well-off societies make up only 20 percent of the world's population but consume nearly 90 percent of its resources.[1])

Respect animal life by eating less meat. Consider that while you can obtain a week's worth of protein by eating a pound of rice combined with beans (as in vegetarian chili), it takes 3 pounds of grain to produce a pound of chicken, and 13 pounds to produce a pound of beef.[2] More pounds of grain require more acres of land to be cleared of trees. And those acres of grain have to be cultivated by machinery that is fueled by gas.

Combat climate change by reducing your use of coal, gas, and oil, which result in global warming by releasing carbon dioxide—a "greenhouse gas"—into the atmosphere. **"But,"** you may say, "we heat our house with electricity, not coal or oil." Bear in mind that most of the electricity we use, including that used to run our computers, is generated by burning "fossil fuels"—mainly coal, oil, and natural gas.[3] Find out whether you could "go solar" for some of your household power needs. Keep in mind, and remind others, that solar businesses create local jobs installing and maintaining panels.

How can we reduce the use of carbon fuels? If you drive a car, avoid unnecessary short trips, look for occasions when you might share a ride or car-pool, and avoid idling. For most cars, idling for more than 10 seconds uses more fuel than restarting the engine.[4] Avoid overheating your residence in winter (wear extra layers) and over-cooling in summer (draw curtains or shades on hot, sunny days, and use fans instead of an air-conditioner). Keeping your rooms two degrees cooler in the winter and two degrees warmer in the summer can reduce fuel production and keep 400 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.[5]

Conserve water by taking shorter and less frequent showers. (Showers account for more than a third of household hot water costs.[6]) Save the car wash for special occasions (but keep your windshield, headlights, and tail-lights clean).

Avoid using unnecessary chemicals—pesticides, weed killers, and household cleaning products. Remember (and teach your children) that the great majority of insects play a valuable role in nature and do not harm humans. Harvest the flat rosette of dandelion leaves for salads or cooking before the yellow flowers appear, and allow other green "volunteers" to coexist with your grass. In the house, use 1 tablespoon baking soda followed by ½ cup white vinegar to clear sink drains. And make an all-purpose spray cleaner by adding a cup of white vinegar and a squirt of dishwashing liquid to a quart of plain water.

Shop with your conscience. Although a book from Amazon may be cheaper than one from a local store, and apples from New Zealand cheaper than those from the local organic orchard, consider their **"carbon footprint"** resulting from the fuel required for transport. When buying staple foods, such as coffee, tea, cocoa, and bananas, that are not grown in the US, look for the **Fair Trade** stamp, to ensure that the farmers practice responsible methods of agriculture and receive a fair price for their crop.

Footnotes
1. United Nations. Global Environmental Outlook, 2003**.**
2. D. Pimental and M. Pimental. Sustainability of meat-based and plant-based diets and the environment. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, September 2003.
3. United States Energy Administration. Frequently Asked Questions. What is the United States' electricity generation by energy source? May 9, 2013
4. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Climate-smart communities guide for local action, March 2014
5. Center for Climate and Energy Solutions. Tips on curbing your carbon footprint, April 2008
6. Environmental Defense Fund. Twenty simple steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.