

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



Background

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP begins with an appreciation of the goodness of all God's creation. The earth, the Bible reminds us, is a gift to all creatures, to "all living beings – all mortal creatures that are on the earth" (Gn 9:16-17). People share the earth with other creatures. But humans, made in the image and likeness of God, are called in a special way to "cultivate and care for it" (Gn 2:15). Men and women therefore bear a unique responsibility under God: to safeguard the created world and by their creative labor even to enhance it. (USCCB, *Renewing the Face of the Earth*).

The Issue at Hand

Opinions vary about the causes and seriousness of environmental problems. Still, we experience their effects in polluted air and water; in oil and wastes on our beaches; in the loss of farmland, wetlands, and forests; and in the decline in rivers and lakes. Scientists identify several other less visible but particularly urgent problems currently being debated by the scientific community, including depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, the extinction of species, the generation and disposal of toxic and nuclear waste, and global warming. They also require urgent attention and action.

There is increasing discussion of global climate change, which refers to long-term increase in the average global temperatures that result from natural variation and human activities. Although some uncertainty still exists as to the exact nature and effects of global climate change, a broad consensus has developed that some significant warming has occurred, brought in part by human activities. (go to www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate)

Environmental issues are interrelated to energy, economics, equity, and ethics. To ensure the survival of a healthy planet, we must not only establish a sustainable economy but must also labor for justice within our country and among nations. We must seek a society where economic life and environmental commitment work together to protect and to enhance life on this planet. (USCCB, *Renewing the Face of the Earth*).

Impact

Whatever the extent, severity or geographical distribution of global climate change, the problem is expected to disproportionately affect the poor, the vulnerable, and generations yet unborn. Projected sea level rises could impact low-lying coastal areas in densely populated nations of the developing world. Storms are most likely to strain the fragile housing structure of the poorest nations. The migration of diseases could further challenge the presently inadequate health care systems of these same nations. Droughts or floods could inflict regions already too often hit by famine, hunger, and malnutrition. (*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2001*).

Action

The virtue of prudence is paramount in addressing climate change. Prudence is intelligence applied to our actions. It allows us to discern the common good in a given situation. Prudence is not, as properly thought, simply a cautious and safe approach to decisions. Rather, it is thoughtful, deliberate, and reasoned basis for taking or avoiding action to achieve a moral good. The consequence of inaction is often greatest to the vulnerable poor populations as well as future generations. (USCCB, *Global Climate Change*).

Caring for God's Creation

Ten Simple Things You Can Do



1. Recycle - everything from traditional recyclables, like old newspapers and used beverage containers, to high-tech ones, such as printer cartridges and cell phones. Extensive recycling programs mean that the amount of energy needed to recycle an already-processed article into something new is far less than the energy required to mine or log all new materials and then process them for the first time.

2. Use reusable containers and utensils for leftovers and bring-your-own lunches. Plastic production uses lots of energy, so sticking to containers that you can reuse again and again will reduce emissions and actually be cheaper for you.

3. Fix or replace leaky pipes, inefficient heaters, generators, and appliances. When not functioning properly, these items can use large amounts of energy and increase your already-pricey power bill.

4. Consider replacing incandescent light bulbs with more energy-efficient ones. New fixtures are up to 66% more efficient and last thousands of hours more than incandescent lights.



5. Turn the lights off when you leave an empty room. If a room is going to be empty for more than 10 minutes, it saves more energy to turn it off and then on again later than to simply leave it on.



6. Carpool - when you drive, share rides with your family, friends, and neighbors. Not only does carpooling decrease the amount of emissions from private vehicle transportation, but you also face less stressful traffic on the roads and pay less money for gas.

7. Plant a tree. Planting a tree in your backyard or neighborhood can provide shade, a playground, fruit, and a sense of community, as well as acting as a carbon "sink," which means that it absorbs carbon.

8. Conduct an Energy Audit. To help you assess your home energy use and learn how you can reduce energy costs and benefit the environment, Home Energy Saver is a helpful web-based tool developed by the Department of Energy (<http://hes.lbl.gov/>).

9. Urge that any legislative action on climate change include provisions that: (1) ease the burden on poor people; (2) offer some relief for workers who may be displaced because of climate change policies; and (3) promote the development and use of alternate renewable and clean-energy resources.



10. Pay attention to bills going before the legislature that concern climate, emissions, or energy policies. Ask legislators to remember that poor people may suffer the most from climate change and legislative measures should include provisions that address disproportionate economic impacts.

Pledge of Commitment

We have come to renew our covenant with God and with one another in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

We have come to help protect God's creation.

We have come as followers of Jesus to commit ourselves anew to one another and to heal injustice and poverty.

We have come together against all threats to life.

We have come to discover some new beauty every day in God's creation: the sunrise and sunset, birds, flowers and trees, rainbows in the sky, the stars, and the many forms of life in the forest.

We have come to listen to the "music of the universe" – water flowing over rocks, the wind, trees bending in the wind, raindrops pattering the roof.

We will remember always that God speaks to us through the beauty of His creation, and we will try our best to answer God's call to reverence all that He has created.