

Environmental Stewardship: Hope for the Earth Help for the Poor

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We all know that changing to compact fluorescent light bulbs saves energy – in fact it uses a whopping 75% less energy than an incandescent bulb.

Have you thought about the source of the electricity to light either bulb? About half of the electric power in the U.S. is generated by coal-fired power plants, and those same plants account for almost 40% of our nation's carbon dioxide pollution from all sources including transportation. In addition, coal mining destroys



Dn. Fribourgh presents.

ecosystems and landscapes, and is a major cause of water pollution in the mining areas. The health consequences of mining and burning coal are staggering.

Did you know that every year, the U.S. generates about 230 million tons of garbage? That's about four pounds per person per day.

It is estimated that less than a quarter of what is recyclable actually is recycled, and the rest goes to a landfill. Landfills produce significant amounts of toxins including methane gas and leachate, a liquid that seeps from the compressed trash.

Our society's lifestyle of consumption burdens the earth and endangers our health. And it further disenfranchises the poor.

“Quite literally, the poorest of the earth live on wealthy people's garbage. In the United States, close to 85 percent of all toxic landfills are in neighborhoods comprised of people of lower economic means and people of color,” says Gordon Aeschliman, president of Target Earth International and founding editor of Green Cross

magazine, in his opening essay for *The Green Bible*.

“The depletion of the Earth’s ecosystems and the deterioration of the biosphere affect the poor most of all,” say Jeremy Rifkin and Carol Grunewald Rifkin in “The Greening of Economics,” an essay published in Sojourners’ study guide *Holy Ground: A Resource on Faith and the Environment*.

“As resources become more scarce and expensive, the least fortunate are the first to experience the consequences of the shortfall. They are the first to be let go in the production process as environmental scarcity forces economic slowdowns. They are the hardest hit by rising prices for energy and other scarce resources. They are also least able to



Former V.P. Al Gore

protect themselves against the ravages of pollution. Toxic dumps, landfills, open sewers, and contaminated drinking water are a recurrent theme in the shanty-towns and urban ghettos of the world.”

Climate change alters God’s creation.

Migration patterns of birds and fish are changing. Permafrost is melting. Coastal wetlands are disappearing as ocean levels rise.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that 20-30 percent of plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, and that acidification of the oceans will change marine life.

Flooding, droughts and severe weather will increase as a result of global climate change.

The effect of this devastation on human society, particularly those living in poverty, is overwhelming.

If no changes are made to stop global climate change, it is predicted that by 2080 600 million people could be affected by malnutrition, an additional 1.8 billion people would likely be living in areas of water scarcity, and an additional 200-400 million people could be exposed to malaria.

Persons living in poverty in the developing nations are particularly vulnerable because of their dependence on the natural resources of the area and have little or no ability to cope with climate variances.

Environmental issues – and the corresponding economic and health and social justice issues – are overwhelming. How can we make a difference? What can we do to effect change?

The Catechism of Creation is an excellent resource for individuals and congregations to begin this ministry. The Committee on Science, Technology and Faith presented the catechism to the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church in June 2005. Deacon Josephine Borgeson was

a consultant (Biology/Science-Faith Education) for the Subcommittee on Creation that initially prepared the document.

The introduction for the catechism states:

“We hope it will help Episcopalians become better informed about fundamental elements of both Christian faith and modern science. We also hope that it will invite congregations to develop an intentional ministry of caring for creation in their own communities, and inspire them to incorporate celebration of the creation in common worship.”

The Catechism of Creation is written in question and answer format like the Prayer Book’s Catechism, Part I builds upon the Bible’s basic doctrine of creation. Part II outlines the modern scientific worldview, including the Big Bang and the evolution of life. Part III presents the biblical roots for environmental care. Each section’s bibliography encourages further study of science, technology and Christian faith.

The Catechism of Creation is available as a download at episcopalchurch.org/science/.

As people of God, Christians are called to care for God’s gift of creation. At this time in history, stewardship of creation must be a bold commitment to pursue energy efficiency, and to help our brothers and sisters in doing the same.

There are dozens of ways that we – individuals, families and communities of faith – can become more energy efficient.

Each day, each of us contributes to the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change – our transportation, our homes, even our choices in food. There are a number of online calculators to measure your own environmental impact.

The Nature Conservancy and Earthday.net are sources for good carbon footprint calculators, and a Google search of “reduce carbon footprint” brings up a variety of helpful websites.

Energy Star, a program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, offers free guides and information for congregations to assist in energy and cost savings through efficient equipment, facility upgrades and maintenance. Go to energystar.gov, click on buildings and plants, then choose congregations. Resources include a free, downloadable guide Putting Energy Into Stewardship, lists of energy equipment and service contractors, and information about Energy Star labeled products.

Utility companies, state energy offices and departments of economic development, and environmental groups across the nation are publishing free books and pamphlets about energy efficiency. In many cases, investments in materials are very quickly offset by savings in energy.

Energy Efficiency – A Dozen Good Ideas

1. Add attic insulation
2. Turn appliances off (including computers) when not using them
3. Change/replace air filters in your heating and cooling system as scheduled
4. Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs
5. Seal windows and doors, install weather stripping
6. Install a low-flow shower head

7. Wash your clothes in cold water
8. Install a water heating system that only heats on demand
9. Use shades and blinds to maximize heating and cooling efficiency
10. Clean the heating coils and check door seals on your refrigerator and freezer
11. Buy a more fuel-efficient automobile and drive fewer miles: carpool, bike, walk, use mass transit
12. Buy a water heater blanket

All great ideas. But what about our brothers and sisters who can barely pay their utility bills, much less invest in weather stripping, insulation, or a new car of any kind?

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

John 13:34

Energy Efficiency – Two Great Ideas

1. Help a family retrofit their home.
2. Contact your leaders. Now. Call or write and urge them to raise fuel economy standards, to support investments in renewable energy, and to support legislation that aims to prevent environmental contamination by toxic substances.

There is much work to do to clean up Mother Earth, and to develop a new ethic of consumption in keeping with our charge as stewards of God's creation, and our charge to love our neighbors as our selves.

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For

the Conservation of Natural Resources

Book of Common
Prayer

