THE ENVIRONMENT:
A MARIST VIEW

By Paul Carr
Director of Development

Our theme for this issue of Today’s Marist — Environment — touches every one of the Marist concerns found in the broader context of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation, including: human dignity, immigration, corporate responsibility and the Pacific Islands. In each of these categories, we can find a component of our concern for the welfare of the physical world that makes all life possible.

The way Mary lived her life and went about her work inspires Marists to do the same. When Marists approach ways in which they will tend to God’s creation, mercy and compassion are driving factors. This is why Marists are increasingly alarmed by the current and developing conditions of our natural world and its resources. There is a clear relationship between ecology and wellness, and a breach in our planet’s health yields devastating implications for all human life and dignity. Marists are passionate in their pursuit for a fair and sustainable world, for circumspect and responsible use of the earth’s resources, and for addressing the disparity between desperate poverty and excess consumption.

The Marists serve collaboratively to be agents of change, affecting a shift in thought and action, changing mindsets to adopt a more informed, responsible and mindful way to utilize our shared but limited natural resources.

In June, 2002, St. John Paul II (then Pope) declared: “Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity. It is on the basis of our recognition that the world is created by God that we can discern an objective moral order within which to articulate a code of environmental ethics. In this perspective, Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in ecological awareness, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.”

In order to take steps to protect our environment from harm, one must first recognize the threats that challenge our physical world. Unfortunately, recognition is not always the problem when it comes to environmental threats; it is often an issue of acknowledgment and putting self-interest aside. This is the real challenge for some of our large corporations whose practices affect our environment and the lawmakers who turn the other way. There is also the problem of corporate-owned media influencing popular thinking on the subject.

Following are a few of the major threats to our environment:

CLIMATE CHANGE. Caused by a number of factors, including: human activity, variations in solar radiation, plate tectonics, and volcanic eruptions. (See our story on page 9 re: the Kiribati family seeking refugee acceptance in New Zealand).

DEFORESTATION. Trees taken for mahogany in Brazil are one of the primary examples of the deforestation biohazard. The Amazon area,
nicknamed “The Lungs of the Earth,” has experienced logging at twice the rate of previous estimates. Removing trees decreases a forest’s ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere, and whether those trees are taken singly or in a large swath doesn’t matter.

**LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY.** The delicate balance in nature is affected when a species moves into extinction for any reason. It is most troubling when the cause is manmade, which may be the case in the increasing loss of bee population in the United States with the use of pesticides as a strong contender for causality.

**AIR POLLUTION.** Carbon levels are elevated in many parts of the world, making it unhealthy for humans, animals and plants to breathe.

**OCEANIC DEAD ZONES.** A combination of climate change and pollution raises acid levels and decreases oxygen. As coral reefs die, the biodiversity of the area is erased and what is left is a dead zone.

**DEPLETION OF NATURAL RESOURCES.** Primary dependence on unsustainable natural resources, such as coal, oil, and natural gas pushes carbon dioxide emissions into our air.

Marists respond to environmental problems affecting poor and vulnerable people who struggle for ecological justice. Polluted air and diminishing water quality, climate change, and unmanaged waste have generated devastating effects on our planet and all who live here. Marists work together with other groups to be advocates for change in this area. They actively seek collaboration with other religious congregations and make strategic choices through ethical investing, including the divestiture of stocks and bonds from fossil fuel corporations.

Every life is sacred, so the life and dignity of every individual deserves respect and protection, including protection from their environment if it poses a threat. This holds especially true for those who dwell in circumstances where respect and protection are rare.

---

**CLIMATE CHANGE REFUGEES**

**FORCED MIGRATION BY CLIMATE CHANGE:**

One family’s story

Thirty-seven years ago, Ioane Teitiota was born on an islet three days journey by boat (two hours by plane) to Tarawa, the main island of the Kiribati island group in the western Pacific, consisting of over 30 coral atolls. The Teitiotas lived on a low-lying atoll where a community of houses had been built on coral that had accreted over time.

A 1989 United Nations report listed Kiribati as an endangered country due to rising sea levels. This was already becoming clear to the nation’s inhabitants, including Ioane and his parents, who were eking out a living on subsistence farming.

While in his late 20s, Ioane met and fell in love with Erika, whom he married, in 2002. The couple moved in with her family in a home built upon a coral seawall on Tarawa. The house was situated on ground level, had electricity, and the family was supplied with well water from the government. There was no accommodation for sewage.

During this time, the villages on Tarawa were becoming overcrowded with Kiribatis fleeing their homes on low-lying atolls flooded by seawater from rising tides. Some came in search of government services, such as the main hospital on Tarawa, though they were all looking for the same thing: a secure place to live in their own country.

From the late 1990s onward, the island had been suffering significant coastal erosion during high tides, and the land surface was flooded regularly resulting in submerged land, sometimes knee-deep during “king tides.” Transportation was affected as the main road connecting north and south Tarawa was often flooded. Daily living was progressively less secure on Tarawa as a result of sea-level-rise and the effects of climate change were threatening all aspects of life there.

The water wells upon which Ioane’s family depended became salty. The salt water destroyed crops, and the land was stripped of vegetation in many places. The family existed on subsistence fishing and Ioane and Erika could see only future insecurity, and the couple wanted to start a family. In 2006, Kiribati President Anote Tong told the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Bangkok that migration would not be a matter of choice for the next generation, but a matter of survival. With the untenable and worsening situation in their homeland, Ioane and Erika decided to seek refugee status in another country.

In 2007, the couple boarded a six-hour flight from Kiribati to Auckland, New Zealand, where they took up visas. Ioane toiled on a vegetable farm while Erika worked as a waitress. Their three children were born in New Zealand, but were not given citizenship there due to a 2006 change to New Zealand’s immigration law. Without adequate counsel from their immigration lawyer, the family had not been informed that visitors are not entitled legally to apply for another visa after 45 days of overstaying. Their work visas expired in 2011, so they were suddenly in the country illegally, ruining their legal status.

Continued on page 12