



THE ENVIRONMENT: A MARIST VIEW

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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 acknowledgement 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.