

LIVING OUR FAITH at St Philip Neri

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Care for God's Creation. Welcome to the latest issue of "Living our Faith," the Peace & Justice Commission newsletter. This issue highlights another core theme of Catholic Social Teaching - care for God's creation. On the back page of this issue, you can learn more about how this commitment is lived out in our community through our activities related to the **Columbia River Pastoral Letter** by the Bishops of the Pacific Northwest.

On a planet conflicted over environmental issues, the Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.

Lord God, creator of all the earth, you have given us the mountains and trees, the waters and the good earth which supports our crops, our animals and ourselves. Never let us lose our love for our land, which is our mother. Help us to protect the land from abuse and to enrich the soil when we abuse it. Make our mother, the earth, fruitful again.

-Prayer from the Philippines

God first reveals God's self in creation, even before the creation of man and woman as we read in the Book of Genesis. God speaks creation into being by the power of God's Word. God's creative Word is present (and spoken), then, in all of creation or to put it another way, creation reveals the presence of God.

God declares that what God has created is good. The goodness of creation therefore is a divine proclamation. This provides us with a *sacramental* view of creation. The proper response to creation is praise and thanksgiving, care, respect, and awe, not exploitation and degradation.

God gave the whole world for the use and sustenance of all of us. At the Second Vatican Council, the bishops spoke of the common purpose of created things as the "universal destination of earthly goods," and taught that the right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family applies to everyone.

Pope John Paul II makes this concept more concrete when he says that private property is under a "social mortgage." If our house is mortgaged, it means that we don't own it outright but rather the bank owns it in part. Similarly, our private property has a mortgage on it, and that mortgage is constituted by the needs of our fellow human beings, now and in the future.

"Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. ... Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few. - Pope John Paul II, *Call for Ecological Conversion*, January 18, 2001

This basic belief of the nature of creation is reflected in contemporary secular concerns about ecology and responsible stewardship. As people of faith, *we* are called to carefully use the resources God gives us for our sustenance and development while protecting them for future generations.

In the midst of so many needs, and continued concern for the health of the natural world, we may feel overwhelmed and wonder where and how we can make a difference. St. Philip Neri Parish is very fortunate for we are guided by the Pastoral Letter **THE COLUMBIA RIVER WATERSHED: Caring for Creation and the Common Good.** It is an international letter; composed by Bishops and local people of Canada and the Pacific Northwest. This letter invites us to give attention to the **PLACE WHERE WE LIVE.** Here is where we can begin.

You may ask just what is a watershed? John Wesley Powell, a scientist has said that a watershed is "an area of land, bounded by a hydrologic (water) system within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of the community." Yes, our place is in the community of life in the lower Willamette Watershed, within the larger Columbia River Watershed. We are linked to all within this common area. Our community of human presence goes back at least 10,000 years. During this time all have sought to live in right relationship within the watershed, believing that ALL LIFE reveals the presence of God.

Our Columbia River Pastoral Letter Committee here at St. Philip Neri is motivated by the intention to live in right relationship with all within our watershed. This desire has led us to consider how our actions make a difference in the natural world. We are focused on three areas: *facilities, education and advocacy*:

- The health of the Willamette River itself is a major concern. During especially wet periods the volume of water entering the combined sewer exceeds the capacity of the system to convey water to the treatment plant. Under these conditions, overflows are diverted directly into the Willamette River. This untreated overflow has a direct effect on the health of the watershed. The **BIOSWALE** project at St. Philip Neri Parish diverts storm water runoff from our parking lot and roof areas away from the sewers while at the same time nurturing native plants in the swale. The project has been generously funded by the City of Portland and Meyer Memorial Trust. We anticipate completion of this project in the Spring of '04.
- A **Ministry Fair**, sponsored by the SE Vicariate was held giving parishes an opportunity to share projects inspired by the Columbia River Pastoral Letter. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES like this invite us all to give attention to the many ways we can "live the Pastoral letter."

- We continue to assess the day to day activities for **sustainable practices** (i.e. recycling, use of paper). We are striving to upgrade the energy efficiency of our parish buildings.
- During the summer months several families participated in a **day of River restoration** at Bridal Veil.
- Working with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns, St. Philip Neri sponsored a **Food Security Workshop** addressing the right of all persons, with attention to folks in our watershed, to have access to local nutritionally adequate food at all times.

"The Columbia Watershed and all creation are entrusted to our loving care." (Pastoral Letter).

The invitation to us through the Pastoral letter is to better understand our Watershed, and to work diligently to "preserve its beauty and integrity." As we move ahead, we need your assistance as we look at the focus for our prayer, study and ministry.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER WATERSHED?

Each of us is responsible for working for the good of our Common Home, the Columbia River Watershed. We recognize God's loving guidance as we seek to promote the greatest good for all.

Some suggested practices/actions:

- Read the Columbia River Pastoral Letter with one other person.
- Earth Day is April 22. Walk through a park to experience God's presence.
- Learn the names of three species of plants native to our watershed.
- Invest in an alternative energy source.

You can read the full text of the Bishop's Letter at www.columbiariver.org.