

## Talking Points for Environmental Discussion at Bishop's Conference, September 2008

### 1. Embrace the Duty

We have a choice over how bad global warming will get. We'll make our choice by our course of ACTION. We can choose "business as usual" and drive climate change to catastrophic proportions. Or we can do our best by transitioning to lower-carbon, lower-energy habits as soon as possible. Making the significant lifestyle changes which can temper humanity's impact on global warming is up to us—those of us alive and active within the next 100 months.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Take the first step

Actor and renowned environmentalist Ed Begley, Jr. says "pick the low hanging fruit." Do the easy things first because the simple, easy steps can add up quickly to create a big impact.<sup>2</sup>

The environmental transformation of our entire society is a long-term process.<sup>3</sup> But we must begin the journey. We must start today.

### 3. Dispense with Disposables

Disposable ANYTHING says it is okay to take from the earth's bounty, use it once, and then throw it "away" to a massive pile of slowly- or never-decomposing mixed-up rubbish. This is no way to treat the precious gift of God's creation.

Eliminate paper plates, paper napkins, plastic forks, bottled water, and styrofoam cups. Learn about the environmental havoc that energy-intense mass-consumption of single-use items is doing to our environment. Switch to reusable items instead: reusable ceramic mugs, real china plates, cloth napkins.<sup>4</sup> Help the members of your community adjust to an earth-wiser mindset.

Reduce paper usage. Use recycled paper—both sides—whenever possible. Decrease single-use agendas and bulletins which are instantly outdated; choose reusable, low-tech formats instead. Encourage participants to share.

### 4. Include Food

When landscaping your church property, *include food* in all your plans. As the impacts of peak oil (the end of cheap oil) begin to be felt across our society, it is essential that we be growing food close to the places we live.<sup>5</sup>

Every church's front lawn, every potted plant on a balcony has the potential to be functional gardening—producing food for people. If your parish members don't need the food right now, start growing food for the hungry; donate it to the food banks of your city.<sup>6</sup>

As we gather the members of our faith communities to grow a food garden together, we are growing far more than just a few tomatoes or cabbages. We are growing community *resilience*—the flexibility of our local communities. We are rediscovering real, essential, hands-on skills that our

population has forgotten over the past 2 to 3 generations. As we do so, we are increasing our community's ability to weather the coming storms: the storms of climate change, economic storms, and variances and shortages in food and energy supplies.

## **5. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**

The old jingle is great, but do you realize it is a hierarchy? Reduce and Reuse are far superior to Recycling. If we did our Reduce job well, we'd have little need for energy-intensive recycling programs!

Yes, please recycle everything you possibly can. If your city or your private waste hauler won't facilitate recycling for your parish or diocese, see if there is a local area charity which will haul your recyclables in order to gain the cash from bottle deposits or the resale value for the material.

Focus on Reduce and Reuse for every purchase your parish makes. Consider whether you truly need this new item. Adjust your aesthetic about how "new" something has to be, and create culture change by helping the people of your community make this shift in values. Consider all aspects of the item, from manufacture to maintenance to disposal.<sup>7</sup> Think beyond which is the "cheaper" alternative; our contributions to global warming, toxic waste, and human rights infractions must now become part of our everyday considerations.

## **6. Power Down**

*Power down* is the term for lifestyles that use less energy overall. As we move into a global warming, peak oil future, *power down* is the only realistic answer. Plainly and simply, we must decrease the amount of power we use.<sup>8</sup>

In your parish or diocese, implement all the energy conservation measures your local electricity provider suggests. Become an example to members of your congregation. Challenge them to switch to CFL light bulbs, ask them to adjust their thermostats to conservation settings, and prod them to learn what more they can do.

As you make new purchases—whether computers, furnaces, or pencil sharpeners—check what alternatives are available. Pick based on the lowest power demands. Choose mechanical or power-free items whenever possible. Recognize power down and power-free as our very real future.

## **7. Relocalize**

As the longer-term impacts of peak oil are felt, we will have less ability to travel and less ability to import items from far away. Start now, and decrease your travel expectations. Practice teleconferencing. Encourage local retreats. Praise parishioners for carpooling. Install bike racks at your churches.

Support local businesses. Appreciate the bounty you have at your doorstep. Buy locally grown food for your church and diocese events. Help these local businessmen stay in business, for the soon-to-come time when we will rely upon them for our every need.<sup>9</sup>

## **8. Adjust Expectations**

Our society perpetuates a mythology that economic “growth” is unlimited and eternal. Yet if everyone on earth consumed at the rate that North America does, we’d need FIVE PLANETS to provide for it all. We do not have five planets to provide resources and materials to further “grow” this economy.

Help your membership understand that the ways of the future will be very different. We will not have bigger houses, bigger cars, and higher incomes. We can’t.

Help your members to look beyond “techno” solutions to our environmental woes. True solutions must solve global warming, peak oil, AND overconsumption. The true solutions are quite simple: power down, reduce, relocalize, reskill, reconnect.

Don’t allow your congregations to wait for government officials or environmental saviors. Form a green team within each of your congregations and cultivate environment-focused gatherings on a regular and ongoing basis. Creating this massive cultural transformation is up to us, the grassroots nobodies.

## **9. Cultivate Hope and Positive Solutions**

Learn about environmental issues,<sup>10</sup> but even more urgently, learn about environmental solutions. Understand how much we CAN DO.<sup>11</sup>

Having a team—a peer group—of people who are greening their lives together is so valuable. When we work from within a team, we no longer feel alone.<sup>12</sup>

Our earth is made up of wonder-inspiring, interdependent ecological cycles, of which humanity is a part. We must redefine our understanding and embrace our place within these cycles. Help your community members reconnect with each other and with the spirit of all creation.

## **10. Reach Out**

Even as you make environmental change in your diocese and in your parishes, challenge your membership to make real changes in their personal lives. Help them see the moral issues within our environmental choices.

Lead the way to green. Partner with other communities of faith within your local area. Become an example and a resource for non-faith members of your town or city.

Reach out to underprivileged members of your city who may not have access to environmental solutions. Only when local resilience and local food security are in place—in all areas of our cities—can we hope to have a foundation for urban peace.

## Resources

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- <sup>1</sup> 100 months is per Andrew Simms, "The Final Countdown," *The Guardian*, August 1, 2008, [www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/aug/01/climatechange.carbonemissions](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/aug/01/climatechange.carbonemissions) ; for more on our moral duty, see "To Serve Christ in All Creation: A Study Guide and Discussion Course Based on the Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal Bishops of New England," Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut (Church Missions Publishing, 2003), available through <http://episcopal.ws123.com/images/customer-files/environment.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> For simple starter steps, see "Environmental Suggestions for Large Events," from *Environmental Change-Making: How To Cultivate Lasting Change in Your Community*, by Joanne Poyourow and The Reverend Peter H. Rood, Jr. Available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm)
- <sup>3</sup> Read about what has been called The Great Turning, "Taking Heart in Tough Times with Joanna Macy," Findhorn Foundation, Positive Energy Conference Reports, Day 2, Evening Session, [http://www.findhorn.org/events\\_report/2008/03/day\\_2\\_taking\\_heart\\_in\\_tough\\_ti\\_1.php](http://www.findhorn.org/events_report/2008/03/day_2_taking_heart_in_tough_ti_1.php)
- <sup>4</sup> "Dispense with Disposables," available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm) ; "The Styro Story," available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm) ; Sierra Club bottled water campaign, [www.sierraclub.org/committees/cac/water/bottled\\_water/bottled\\_water.pdf](http://www.sierraclub.org/committees/cac/water/bottled_water/bottled_water.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> "What Will We Eat as the Oil Runs Out? Food Security in an Energy-Scarce World," by Feasta (Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability), [www.feasta.org/events/foodconf/food\\_conference.htm](http://www.feasta.org/events/foodconf/food_conference.htm) ; "Why Edible Landscaping," by Joanne Poyourow, available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm) ; *Food Not Lawns: How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden and Your Neighborhood into a Community*, by H.C. Flores
- <sup>6</sup> Read about the Community Garden at Holy Nativity parish [www.holynativityparish.org/wordpress/](http://www.holynativityparish.org/wordpress/) Support resources such as Urban Farming <http://urbanfarming.org/> ; Read about the benefits of Victory Gardens at "It's Time for a New Victory Garden Movement" by Sharon Astyk, *Casaubon's Book*, <http://casaubonsbook.blogspot.com/2008/02/it-is-time-now-for-new-victory-garden.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Learn about UnShopping at [www.coopamerica.org/programs/shopunshop/unshopping/index.cfm](http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/shopunshop/unshopping/index.cfm)
- <sup>8</sup> "What is Power Down, And Why Do We Have To Do It Now?" available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm)
- <sup>9</sup> "ReLocalizing Your Urban Lifestyle," available through [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.resources.htm)
- <sup>10</sup> "Peak Oil Primer," by *Energy Bulletin*, <http://www.energybulletin.net/primer> ; Global warming impacts on California, "Our Changing Climage: Assessing the Risks," by the Union of Concerned Scientists, <http://www.climatechoices.org/ca/site/our-changing-climate.html> ; Ecological Footprint, at "Humanity's Footprint," *Global Footprint Network*, [www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn\\_sub.php?content=global\\_footprint](http://www.footprintnetwork.org/gfn_sub.php?content=global_footprint)
- <sup>11</sup> The monthly meetings of the Environmental Change-Makers highlight What We Can Do across a panorama of topics. See a listing of past meetings at [www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.past.htm](http://www.EnviroChangeMakers.org/ECM.past.htm)
- <sup>12</sup> See *Environmental Change-Making: How To Cultivate Lasting Change in Your Community*, by Joanne Poyourow and The Reverend Peter H. Rood, Jr. (Cathedral Center Press, 2008).