

March 2008

Highlights

Youth Ministry in Harmony with God's Creation

Easter is so very early this year. Signs of spring and rebirth, nature's ever present symbols, are as likely to be covered with snow in the Midwest as visible to the celebration of the Resurrection.



This issue of NACYML News may greet you enjoying an unseasonably warm day or turning up the thermostat, both signs of the wonder of God's creation and our ever changing and challenging climate. The environment is on the minds of many these days.

Environmental stewardship is something we are called to as Catholic Christians. It is also a topic that many of us need to spend time

exploring and learning. Environmental stewardship is an issue about which young people are passionate and proactive.

This issue will offer insights from colleagues who have accepted the environmental challenge. People who offer ideas on praying with nature, going green in your parish, and are willing to share some of the theology involved in environmental spirituality.

As the Earth begins to show her annual signs of renewal, share in these thoughts and make a connection to youth and the environment.

Heartfelt Thanks

NACYML gratefully recognizes three members of the Leadership Team who are completing their term of service: Pat Clasby, Chris Weber, and Mary Harrison. Each has made outstanding contributions to both the Leadership Team and NACYML.

- Pat Clasby and Chris Weber not only served on the NACYML Leadership Team but were also members of the NFCYM Task Group that moved NACYML from a concept to a reality.
- Pat Clasby was a member, and chair, of the Marketing Coordinating Committee. It was Pat's creative genius that

From the Chair

An Amazing Journey

My tenure as chair and my term of service on the NACYML Leadership Team both end in April with the 2008 annual Leadership Team meeting. Little did I know when I said yes six years ago to chairing the youth ministry leaders task group for the NFCYM that I was embarking on an amazing, Spirit filled journey.

[Read Grace's article...](#)

Other Feature Articles...

And God Saw How Good it Was

The church teaches us that nature plays an important role in our

produced the initial NACYML promotional video shown at NCCYM in Pittsburgh where an angel (which looked a lot like Bob McCarty) kept whispering in the ear of a youth ministry leader, NACYML. Pat's determination and enthusiasm has been an inspiration which has spurred NACYML forward.

- **Chris Weber** served as chair of the Membership Services Coordinating Committee and as secretary. Chris' wisdom and thoughtful consideration of issues provided a solid foundation for many Leadership Team decisions and actions. Chris also provided comic relief with his witty comments and analogies when meetings became a little tense.
- **Mary Harrison** was a spiritual leader for the team, keeping us focused on being Spirit led. Mary brought a depth of experience in youth ministry to the team which helped us prioritize our work and develop realistic goals.

A Warm Welcome

NACYML was blessed with nine outstanding candidates for the Leadership Team this past fall. The discernment committee had the arduous task of discerning from the nine, the new members for the Leadership Team. We thank all nine for stepping forward to be considered for the Leadership Team. We warmly welcome to the Leadership Team:

- **Dean Diomedes:** parish coordinator of youth ministry from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- **Jim Flannagan:** parish coordinator of youth ministry from the Archdiocese of Boston
- **Joe Perdreauxville:** parish coordinator of children's and youth ministries from the Diocese of Tucson

search for God. When we truly connect with nature, we have in some mysterious way found and connected with God. Yet, on the other hand, if we humans reject the presence of God in creation, "nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished." Devoid of its true meaning nature is then simply something to be exploited for its riches.

[Read more...](#)

Meet the Wilderness Program

Teens today are at greater risk than ever before: experimenting with drugs, alcohol, sex, and gangs—just to belong. How do we decrease the demands of society upon them to perform consistent with parental and peer expectations, and help them find themselves in the midst of so many choices that put their lives at risk?

[Read more...](#)

Some Practical Ways to be Greener

'Conserving' is not something that our country is accustomed to doing. We are a 'throw away society.' We are also a driving society—we love our vehicles. We love the independence of driving where we need to go....Despite our personal habits and comforts, we are all called to be good stewards of the Earth.

[Find out by reading further...](#)

Changing Habits, Changing Lives

Two weeks. In that amount of time lives can be changed—sometimes forever. Just ask Brenda Koinis, Kathryn Runman-Zimney, and Devin Klaserner.

Koinis is one of the founders of [The H2O Project](#), an organization dedicated to educating people about the lack of clean drinking water around the world. It also serves to help raise funds for groups who are working to provide clean water.

[Read more...](#)

- **Maureen Smith:** parish pastoral associate for faith formation and youth ministries from the Diocese of Albany

We look forward to new possibilities with new members on the Leadership Team.

With Deep Appreciation Grace Cassetta: Founding NACYML Chair

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.” (Voltaire)

The concept of the National Association of Catholic Youth Ministry Leaders began long before its approval by NFCYM in January of 2004 or the official public launch at NCCYM in Pittsburgh that same year.

Beginning with a conversation at the NFCYM membership meeting in San Diego in January 2002, and following through until today, Grace Cassetta has been at the heart of establishing and building NACYML. As the founding chairperson, Grace has, through her commitment to collaboration and shared leadership, her conviction in the work and mission of NACYML, and her deep faith and love of church allowed all of us to share in her excellence.

Grace leaves the Leadership Team this March, but is quick to say that now she can be an active part of this member driven organization. She will continue to lead all of us in the growing and nurturing of this organization.

The gifts that Grace shares so willingly have been invaluable and much appreciated. Thank you, Grace, for all you are, and the many ways you have built and lived the vision and mission of NACYML.

A Picture Is Worth...

Articles in this newsletter correspond to the Core Competencies detailed in the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers.

Look for the symbol in the article that indicates which core competency the article addresses.

To learn more about the standards, see the [resource page](#) which is always accessible from the newsletter navigation bar. It provides a summary of the core competencies and the specialized competencies for youth ministry leaders.



*Visit the Members' Only Section of the NACYML Website
for More News and Special Offers*

Institute for Adolescent Catechesis



Sponsored by the [Center for Ministry Development](#), the August 11-15, 2008 Institute is designed for parish youth ministers, directors of religious education, diocesan leaders, and anyone working with young people. Participants will be equipped to

communicate a vision for adolescent catechesis and will be prepared to plan and implement dynamic catechesis for you. [Download the informational brochure.](#)

 (917 KB)

Respecto—Training for Youth Ministry

This bilingual program of the [Mexican American Cultural Center](#) in San Antonio offers creative resources to foster spiritual growth and skills for Latino youth to take an active leadership role in the life and mission of the church. The weekend training session is intended for adult youth ministers to learn the program and offer it in their parishes.



Upcoming training dates are: May 1-4, June 5-8, July 10-13, and July 24-27, 2008. A limited number of scholarships are available.

[Download the brochure and registration information](#), or the [bilingual information flyer](#).

 (560 KB)

Faithful Citizenship: A New Website from USCCB




The new [Faithful Citizenship website](#) is now up and running. It includes a wide range of resources for prayer and worship, educational programs, family discussions, youth and young adults, parish social concerns and pro-life committees,

diocesan planning and events, and many other groups and ministries. [See the website for more information](#), or [download the informational flyer](#).

 (190 KB)



Print the Newsletter!

Two print options offer a streamlined process for printing *NACYML News*.

- Use your browser's print function or click on the  "Print this page" link at the bottom of the right-hand navigation column to print an individual page.
- Print the entire issue by using the link below. This will open a single PDF document made up



of "printed pages" of each article in order. Or, download this PDF to your computer by right-clicking the link and selecting "Save Target As..." With the PDF file open, click the printer command in the Adobe Reader interface and the entire issue will be printed.

 Download the PDF print file for this entire issue.  (344 KB)

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March 2008

From the Chair

*By Grace Cassetta
Director of Youth Ministry
Diocese of Las Cruces*

An Amazing Journey

My tenure as chair and my term of service on the NACYML Leadership Team both end in April with the 2008 annual Leadership Team meeting. Little did I know when I said yes six years ago to chairing the youth ministry leaders task group for the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry that I was embarking on an amazing, Spirit filled journey. Serving on that task group and the NACYML Leadership Team has taught me three important ministry lessons.



Lesson One: Have a well developed 'ministry business plan' when beginning a new ministerial venture.

Why a ministry business plan you may ask? In youth ministry, we do well with ministry planning in response to the spiritual and personal needs of young people and their families. But do we take the time to look at the impact of the program on the greater faith community? In developing the NACYML proposal for the NFCYM, we needed to go beyond the fact that having the association was responding to an expressed need by youth ministry leaders. We needed to show how NACYML would impact and benefit the parent organization, NFCYM. We needed to exhibit fiscal responsibility—both for future NACYML membership and the membership of NFCYM. Defining accountability in the proposal was also key to ensuring that NACYML would function in line with the vision and values of NFCYM. I have found great benefit in my own ministry utilizing a ministerial business plan—one which includes the proposed ministry program, its impact and benefit to the larger faith community, the fiscal effect of the program, and lines of accountability.

Lesson Two: Shared leadership can move mountains.

My preferred leadership style is one of collaboration and empowerment. Yet serving on the NACYML Leadership Team has shown me true shared leadership in action. Though there are specific roles on the Leadership Team, their function is to facilitate the work of the Leadership Team. It is the entire Leadership Team who takes responsibility for the management of NACYML. This understanding of shared leadership for the Leadership Team is not just part of our Standard Operating Procedures, it has been my lived experience. I have been honored and humbled to work with the dedicated members of the Leadership Team. The atmosphere of our meetings is one of mutual respect, trust, openness to dialogue and disagreement, and appreciation of the giftedness of each member. We work (or perhaps struggle might be the better word) to reach consensus on decisions. I believe that the effectiveness of shared leadership on the team is due the commitment of each person to NACYML and to the realization we need each other (and all the NACYML members) to make NACYML a success.

I have also seen how shared leadership is the foundation for a member driven organization. When NACYML was launched in December 2004, the leadership responsibilities fell to the Leadership Team. However, now in 2008, the leadership for the work of the NACYML is being shared among the entire membership. Two key examples of this are the project team for the NACYML newsletter and the project team for the NACYML booth at the 2007 National Catholic Youth Conference. Both of these project

teams have provided key services for NACYML. Though a Leadership Team member might facilitate the project teams, the work and leadership of the teams is shared by all. Due to this foundation in shared leadership, I know that though I leave the Leadership Team, I still have responsibility as a member to serve NACYML in some capacity, whether serving on a project team, a coordinating committee, writing for the newsletter, or participating in discussion forums. I urge all members to consider how you too might serve in the shared leadership of NACYML.

Lesson Three: I am with you always. (Matthew 28:13)

I had a tough time naming this third lesson, for it is one that is quite profound and personal, plus it is more of an experience than a lesson. In the face of challenges to their ministry, members of the Leadership Team have remained faithful to their baptismal call to be disciples of Christ. The manner in which they endured these challenges reminds me of Jesus bearing his cross. For like Christ, they prayerfully struggle with their cup, discern where God is leading them, and willingly follow that path. This is a great witness and an amazing inspiration to me. For like others, these past six years have been a ministry challenge for me. Yet, in my Leadership Team colleagues, I found Jesus saying, "I am with you always" in the struggles, in the successes, in sorrow, in joy, always until the end of time. This experience has been one of deep spiritual connection, one of truly being the body of Christ, where one member suffers, we all suffer; where one member rejoices, we all rejoice. The Leadership Team lives authentic Christian community. This gives me hope because we are not special. And if the Leadership Team, who came together as strangers, can allow the Spirit to guide us to be community, to be church, I believe the Spirit can do the same in our local communities and in the world, if we just open ourselves to the possibility.

Finally as I say farewell to the NACYML Leadership Team, I offer a prayer for the team and all NACYML members in the words of St. Paul:

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3-6)

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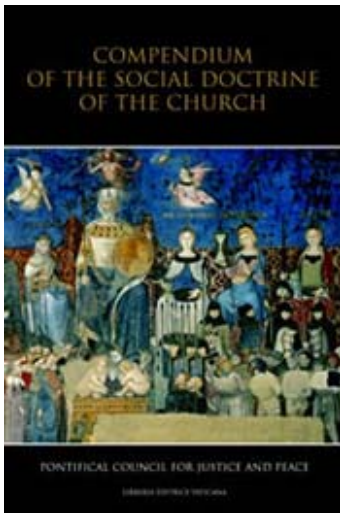
March 2008

And God Saw it Was Good: The Environment and Catholic Social Doctrine

By Deacon Bob Killoren
Diocese of Columbus Scout Chaplain
Columbus, Ohio

In the Beginning

Genesis tells us that when the act of creation was finished God saw how good it was. The goodness that pervades all of nature “reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it.” And by entering into communication with nature, we begin to understand “its rich and symbolic meaning...allowing us to enter into its realm of mystery...This realm opens the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth.”



(Paragraph #487 of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Chapter X, © Copyright 2004 Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Reprinted April 2005)

The church teaches us that nature plays an important role in our search for God. When we truly connect with nature, we have in some mysterious way found and connected with God. Yet, on the other hand, if we humans reject the presence of God in creation, “nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished.” Devoid of its true meaning nature is then simply something to be exploited for its riches.

It is with these essential truths that we begin to see why the church places so much emphasis on “safeguarding the environment” in its recently released *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

In this article I will attempt to simply outline the major elements of the Compendium’s statements on the environment and highlight some of the critical teachings.

Biblical Aspects

Scripture reveals the relationships humans have with nature:

- God made all of creation, but only humans are made in God’s image. (#451)
- Humans are part of creation but they also take on duties to help make something of it. (#451)
- God “entrusted all of creation to their responsibility, charging them to care for its harmony and development.” (#451)
- Nature “is always an object of praise in Israel’s prayer.” (#452)
- God enters creation in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. (#453)
- “The whole of creation participates in the renewal flowing from the Lord’s Paschal Mystery.” (#455)

Read It Yourself

Humans and the Universe of Created Things

The biblical vision inspires the behavior of Christians in relation to their use of the Earth, and also with regard to the advances of science and technology:

- Today, "especially with the help of science and technology, man has extended his mastery over nearly the whole of nature and continues to do so." (#456)
- The results of science and technology are, in themselves, positive, when truly "used in the service of humanity." (#458)
- "We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations." (#459)
- In acting contrary to the good of nature, "instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God." (#460)

The Crisis in the Relationship between Humans and the Environment

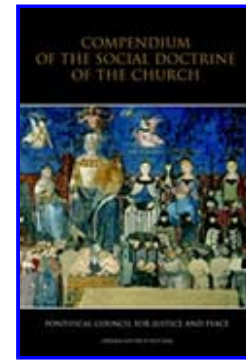
Because of the powerful means of transformation offered by technological civilization, it sometimes seems that the balance between man and the environment has reached a critical point:

- The consumer culture mistakenly sees "an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed." (#462)
- "With the progress of science and technology, questions as to their meaning increase and give rise to an ever greater need to respect the transcendent dimension of the human person and creation itself." (#462)
- "Christian culture has always recognized the creatures that surround man as also gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded with a sense of gratitude to the Creator." (#464)
- Humans have a responsibility "for the preservation of a sound and healthy environment for all." (#465)

A Common Responsibility

Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good:

- "Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future." (#467)
- Governments have responsibilities to care for the environment on the part of all. (#468)
- "An economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profits as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits." (#470)
- "The new possibilities offered by current biological and biogenetic techniques are a source of hope and enthusiasm on the one hand, and of alarm and hostility on the other." (#472)
- "Entrepreneurs and directors of public agencies involved in the research, production and selling of products derived from new biotechnologies must take into account not only legitimate profit but also the common good." (#478)
- "The environmental crisis and poverty are connected by a complex and dramatic set of causes that can be resolved by the principle of the universal destination of goods, which offers a fundamental moral and cultural orientation." (#482)
- "Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles, in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common good are the factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments." (#486)



Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

Catholic teachings on social justice have never been easy for society to accept and live by. The same is true with what the church is saying about protecting the environment and safeguarding nature. Many Catholics will find some of what the church teaches on the environment difficult to accept. But other non-Catholic faiths, governments, and secular organizations applaud the stand the church has taken on environmental issues. Instructing our young people on these important principles will strengthen the Catholic Church's voice in protecting God's creation.

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March 2008

NEWEcology and Youth Ministry

By Patrick Mooney

Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Diocese of Monterey

Much is said these days about stewardship and about the environment. Stewardship is often broadcast in our parish communities as time, talent, and treasure; while talk of the environment often reflects an image of delicacy that we are destroying, and need to stop polluting to restore it. We are invited to engage in stewardship as if it was a list of things we check off after completion; while the image of the environment is often presented as disconnected from all of humanity. It lives in our imaginations as a pristine wilderness—untouched, clean, perfect. For me, this disconnect has always been a struggle to ‘engage’ in the conversation. If I am unable to engage in the conversation other than believing these are important things to look at and take care of, how then am I to communicate this to the young church with whom I minister?

In N. Scott Momaday’s book, *House Made of Dawn*, the reader is led to a point in the novel where the main character has lost his way in life; he has forgotten the story, his people’s story, and he needs help. The image of remembrance is offered to him as a way back. He is to go out and be with the land, to sit in one spot for a time and learn the life of it—watch a sunrise, feel the wind and the sun, to hear the water in the stream. He is asked to return with the season to that very spot so he can learn how the land lives and responds to the ever emerging needs, and changes.

This remembrance is what I hold up as a starting point into a spirituality of ecology. Remembrance is given to us every time we gather and pray as a community. We hold something very sacred and powerful through this process. In remembering, we get to experience the past and respond to our future. As Momaday challenges us, remembrance can, and should, change the way we encounter others and all of creation. When we remember an area, some land or a place, in turn, we find the connections—connections that tie us to creation and to the ongoing connection creation continually offers us. Creation willfully offers us life—life in all forms of plants, animals, the micro and the macro, from a cell to an aspen grove to the oceans—which produce seventy percent of our oxygen.

I believe when we do not remember, when we forget about the larger picture and leave other life out of our planning, we find ourselves in a place of neglect and arrogance. Is creation nothing more than God’s gift to be disposed of as we see fit? Some argue yes, but I find that very limiting. Where is the relationship of remembrance?



The ecologist and theologian, Fr. Thomas Berry asks, “What is the result of all of our technological, social, and scientific advances? All of our achievements have brought forth great advances, but at what cost?”

The only suitable interpretation of western history seems to be the ironic interpretation. This irony is best expressed, perhaps, by the observation that our supposed progress toward an ever improving human situation is bringing us to a waste world instead of a wonder world, a situation that found its finest expression in *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett (*The Dream of the Earth*, 17).

There are no unique guidelines I can offer to you as a youth minister that will somehow connect you to creation, and to environmental stewardship. The image that has been offered to me is one of caretaker; we are invited to be caretakers of creation—for awhile. While we are here briefly, we have been given a home to take care of, to watch over, so others may enjoy the home as well. The home, or creation, is not ours, but together we work to allow each other to live and flourish within it. When the master returns to the house we have had the opportunity to take care of it. I hope to hear the master say to us, “Well done good and faithful servant! You have found my reflection in creation, and you have embraced it.”

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March 2008

Internet Resources on Environmental Stewardship and Ecological Justice

*Compiled by Faye Abbondanza
Diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry
Diocese of Youngstown*

If this is a topic that speaks to your mind and heart, the following are websites which offer resources and further information.

Web Resources

- [Catholic Relief Services: Education on Stewardship and Creation](#)
- [Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, Vanderbilt University](#)
- [Environmental Web Directory](#)
- [Environmental Justice Index from the Sierra Club](#)
- [National Religious Partnership for the Environment](#)
- [Top 1000 Websites from the World Environmental Organization](#)
- [USCCB's Environmental Justice Program: Caring for God's Creation](#)



Further Your Learning

The Annotated Bibliography below is an offering of foundational resources and readings in the area of environmental stewardship and spirituality. Although extensive, it is not a comprehensive listing. Please download and review as needed.

[Download the Entire Set of Readings and Resources](#)  (22 KB)

Email *NACYML News* at nacyml@nfcymoffice.org

March 2008

Meet the Wilderness Program

By Rev. Kenneth Fleck
 Pastor, St. George Parish
 Tinley Park, Illinois

Following Christmas most from the Midwest turn their attention to the Super Bowl or the Annual Auto Show. The Auto Show is intended to do one thing—sell cars. This year the focus has shifted from the muscle cars and glitz to ‘The Green Thing’—i.e., making a greenback while saving the environment and being socially responsible.



It is a matter of supply and demand and values. Each person spends their time and money on what is important to them. What are we willing to pay for the lives of our youth today?

Teens today are at greater risk than ever before: experimenting with drugs, alcohol, sex, and gangs—just to belong. How do we decrease the demands of society upon them to perform consistent with parental and peer expectations, and help them find themselves in the midst of so many choices that put their lives at risk?

Meet the Wilderness is a program based in Colorado that addresses these issues. I have been involved with this program for thirty years. It began in 1974 with a couple of priests, a lay friend who wanted to introduce inner city teens to see and experience nature firsthand and to be challenged by their experiences to make healthy life choices.



I have personally led nine groups of eleven teens, another adult chaperone, and two guides into this wilderness experience. Each time I learn more about myself, life, and the challenges of being a teen in today’s society.

Our young people are the most precious resource we have. They are the future leaders who will inherit the world we pass on to them. They will also vote and make life decisions for us when we, the current adults, are old and dependent upon their care. How will they value life, as well as us? We must set the example.



The most precious gift we can share with them is our time. When we spend our time with them they learn from shared experiences, and we do as well. They learn our values and they learn the value of their life too.

When teens are taken out of their normal environment and given a set of challenges without preset conclusions, they will learn about themselves through the experience. Mistakes will be made, the sense of failure is real, but the support of the team, without artificial goals, allows each teen to grow in awareness. Learning through experience teaches lessons about life that are not contained in any book, but it is the cement that binds knowledge to wisdom, and produces actions and leadership.

If we want a better world, not only free from pollution, but

one with a social conscience that embodies the best values of our varied faiths and cultures, then we have to plant these ideas in the fertile minds and experiences of our youth today.

Programs like Meet the Wilderness offer teens such opportunities. They explore not only the wilderness of nature in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, but also the wilderness within.

If you would like more information about this program you can [explore the website](#).

Pope John XXIII said "If you want peace work for justice." At this point in history we are at a turning point of creating a world peace through communication of ideas. The internet is the highway that connects different cultures and worlds. It can be the pathway to peace, or an expensive toy that wastes the minds and opportunity for a better world.

The choice is ours. We can opt for glitz, glamour, and muscle, or we can spend the most precious commodity we have, our time, to make our world a better place by investing in our young people.

Meet the Wilderness is one of many programs. The youth ministry programs in our parishes and local communities cannot thrive without the support of parents and adults who care enough to get involved.

When we show young people that we care enough to spend quality time with them, and develop programs that develop their social awareness, they will become responsible leaders. We are building the future together.



MISSION: *Meet the Wilderness* teaches life skills by providing adventure education programs to youth groups. Our programs instill trust, self-discipline, self-esteem, teamwork, communication skills, leadership qualities and confidence in their abilities to meet unique life challenges, actively engage in their community and gain an appreciation of the natural environment

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March 2008

Summer Camp: A Year-Round Experience of God's Creation

By Kyle Holtgrave

Associate Director for Youth and Young Adult Ministry
Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

My journey in youth ministry began when I was a high school student working summers as a camp counselor at [Ondessonk Catholic Youth Camp](#) in southern Illinois. Through this work experience I learned that camp was not just a summer thing. Once the school year begins, camp is open for a new season of camping by catering to school groups, scout troops, and area colleges, for environmental education and exploration. What does a year-round camp program offer us in our youth ministry practices? Catholic social teaching calls us to care for God's creation, and many summer camps offer programming that helps us learn to be better stewards of the environment.

A number of summer camps are open year-round with specialized programming so the camp can continue its environmental justice mission beyond the summer months. [Camp Gray](#), located in the Baraboo Hill area of Wisconsin, offers a great explanation on why learning about the environment is important: "As Christians, we care for creation (the Earth, plants, animals, and each other) because we are part of a greater community." The [Pines Catholic Camp](#) in Texas advocates that, "the goal of environmental education is to draw students closer to the environment and to help build an understanding of their role as stewards of God's Earth." Camps like these, through their environmental education programs, offer youth ministry teams a wealth of catechetical opportunities for young people.



What are these outdoor and environment education programs like? While working at [Camp Ondessonk](#), I had many opportunities to staff outdoor education programs. A typical outdoor environmental education experience starts with orienting students to a new environment in the great outdoors as well as a new way of relating to one another through team building. One of my favorite experiences on the first day of an outdoor education program is to watch students' reaction to how they were to live for the next few days, as the normal modern conveniences of home were no longer available. Getting people out of their comfort zone by trying new experiences, such as rustic living conditions, is a staple for many outdoor education programs.



The days are filled with hands-on activities such as exploration hikes, pond studies, and interactive games. On my nature hikes, we did not just talk about how the forest changes over time, but I took the students to places in the woods where change is happening and ask them why they think this change is happening. The only way, in my opinion, to study a pond properly is to strap on some hip waders and get your feet wet! Interactive games give students a practical experience on how things work in nature and what happens when we are not good stewards of creation. Evenings at an outdoor education program can be enchanting, as many students have never been given opportunities to experience God's creation in the same way most people throughout history have—by the light of a campfire!

By the end of a typical outdoor education program, students have grown in countless ways. [Outward Bound Wilderness](#), a nationally recognized nonprofit adventure-education organization, lists the following as benefits for participating in outdoor experiences:

- improved resilience and problem solving skills in students
- creating lasting positive change
- improving youth development, particularly in the areas of attention span, creativity, academic performance, and social and environmental responsibility

I would add a noticeable improvement to the relationship between adults and students who share the outdoor experience to that list as well. These benefits are wonderful assets, and you can use these programs with their accompanying benefits in your youth ministry as well.

Where can you find a camp or other outdoor education program in your area? A number of camp programs are accredited through the [American Camp Association](#) (ACA). The ACA website has easy-to-use search engines and other information about the camping industry. There are agencies and service providers that offer outdoor experiences, too. Your local YMCA or YWCA might have adventure programs to help accomplish your ministry goals. One service provider that I worked with in my camping career is called [Nature's Classroom](#). This program has sites available mainly on the East Coast, but there are a few programs in the Midwest. A search on the Internet will offer a wide variety of secular programs and places for outdoor experiences.

In this article, I make specific references to programs I have either been directly involved with, or have learned about through networking and professional organizations. I am sure there are countless other camps and programs out there that could be mentioned. If you know of a great resource in your area, please tell us about it on the NACYML forums!

Email *NACYML News* at nacyml@nfcymoffice.org

March 2008

Changing Habits, Changing Lives

By Jenn Ledonne

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish
Alexandria, Kentucky

Two weeks. In that amount of time lives can be changed—sometimes forever. Just ask Brenda Koinis, Kathryn Runman-Zimney, and Devin Klaserner.



Koinis is one of the founders of [The H2O Project](#), an organization dedicated to educating people about the lack of clean drinking water around the world. It also serves to help raise funds for groups who are working to provide clean water.

It all started when she saw a video from [World Vision](#). It showed a three foot long Guinea worm being removed from a child's leg. The child had gotten the worm by drinking dirty water.

“After I finished crying from watching the video, I knew I had to do something,” Koinis said. “The Holy Spirit used it to pierce my heart. I prayed and God gave me the idea.”

That idea was the H2O Project. It challenges participants for two weeks to:

- Make water your only beverage
- Save the money you would have spent on drinks
- Contribute one hundred percent of the saved money to a well drilling organization

That idea has helped raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for groups working to provide clean drinking water in places such as Kitui, Africa.

Kathryn Runman-Zimney, Mission Education Coordinator for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, is very familiar with the need for clean drinking water. The Archdiocese formed a global solidarity partnership with the people of Kitui.



“The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis has a Global Solidarity Partnership with the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya,” said Runman-Zimney. “Our partnership is based on mutuality and relationship—not about trying to ‘fix’ things for the people of Kitui. We have spent three years in relationship—forming common committees in each diocese, reading books together, and creating a common mission statement—before we began to address the needs of the people of Kitui. We care about one another; when the people of Kitui cry, the people of St. Paul and Minneapolis cry as well. We received calls and e-mails immediately when our bridge collapsed last August. Our office, The Center for Mission, is in touch with people of the Diocese of Kitui daily, and especially hold all the people of Kenya in prayer during these days of unrest surrounding the recent election.”

Runman-Zimney got in touch with [The H2O Project](#) and was Koinis' first large group. The archdiocese began a pilot project during Lent 2005 with school children. “They learned water awareness,” Runman-



Zimney said. "They really got the idea that people were suffering."

The pilot was so successful, it was offered diocesan wide in Advent 2005. The group asked people to give the gift of self for someone else. People were asked to be in solidarity with the people of Kitui, to remember them in prayer, and to drink only water. So far more than \$100,000 has been raised. This project has been so successful, it has grown beyond The H2O Project.

Runman-Zimney said, "The young people in our archdiocese really understand the idea of solidarity when drinking water during the H2O Water Challenge. They now realize the importance of clean drinking water for our brothers and sisters in Christ in Kenya, and have a new awareness about water issues in our world. Pen pals have been formed between schools, and we feel because our partnership is all about relationships, the H2O Project has really taken off."



At the recent National Catholic Youth Conference in Columbus, Ohio, Brenda Koinis and her husband staffed a booth offering information on The H2O Project. She saw a lot of enthusiasm from the youth she met. They would ask how one dollar could provide safe drinking water for one person for one year. Most put on a wristband. Many donated money out of their pocket.

One teen who put on a wristband and took the challenge was Devin Klaserner from Covington, Kentucky. When he stopped by the booth, he was surprised at how the United States takes water for granted. "We drink pop and milk while people struggle for clean water," he said. "It was nice to help someone who needed it."

The challenge started off harder than he expected. "It was hard to remember at first. I begged for a CapriSun but my friend reminded me about the challenge. After a couple of

days it got easier."

Not only did he help others by completing the challenge, he also helped himself. "I felt so much better when I drank only water. I now choose water over Coke."

Since the conference, thousands of wristbands have been ordered. "They will see how giving up a little will do a lot," said Koinis.

Fast Facts from Brenda Koinis, The H2O Project:

- The H2O Project impacts lives. By participating you are saving a life the same as if you pulled someone from a burning building. By giving the money saved over two weeks, you are providing clean water for someone for virtually the rest of his/her life.
- The supplies are free, thanks to a grant. Participants choose which group will receive the money raised during the project.
- Many of the problems in developing countries and poverty-stricken areas stem from the lack of clean water. Without clean water, farmers are not able to work because they are too sick. Youth can not attend school because they must walk long distances to get water for their families. More hospitals are built to accommodate the sick, but due to a lack of clean water, people are not able to get well. Providing clean water is a fundamental and inexpensive way to help many people live better lives.

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Praying with Creation

By Catherine T. Werner

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Many of us are very skilled when it comes to incorporating the latest technology into our youth ministry programs, but how often do we incorporate God's creation? Perhaps we need to turn to creation for some prayer time inspiration.

Atmosphere for prayer can really set the mood. When weather permits, hold your prayer time outside. A prayer service in your meeting room is very different than the same prayer service held in a forest or a garden. For those of us lucky enough to live near the ocean, seeing the crashing waves can remind our teens of the mighty power of God. Being on the top of a mountain and hearing the winds rush past assures us that God is present and hears our prayer. Incorporating the environment into our prayer also reminds us that it is our responsibility to be good stewards of the Earth.



If it is not possible to be outside for prayer, bring nature into what you are doing. Nature provides us with countless reminders of God's love for us. Flowers can remind our young women of their God given beauty. Autumn leaves can be a beautiful metaphor for life, death, and resurrection. A simple stone can serve as a reminder of a prayer commitment. Seashells have long been a symbol for baptism, so have your group use shells as part of a prayer service reaffirming their baptismal promises. The objects we encounter outside in everyday circumstances take on new meaning when they have been incorporated into our prayers.

Give young people the chance to use all their senses during prayer. The retreat house that our youth use each summer is surrounded by a blueberry farm. Our morning prayer takes on a different tone as the smell of fresh blueberries wafts across the yard. Feeling the water cleanse our dirty hands reminds us of our sins being washed away through the sacrament of reconciliation, and the taste of fresh fruit lets the teens experience the sweetness of God's creation. The sight, sound, and smell of a crackling bonfire helps bring to life the power of the Holy Spirit. Seeing a sunrise can give a sense of hope to a young person who feels consumed by a dark time in his or her life.

Our young people often crave quiet time with God. How different would their prayer time be if they were able to feel the sun's warmth on their face, or experience the cold as they peered into the night sky? Our Creator God has already supplied us with all the prayer materials we could ever ask for, but it is up to us to recognize and use these gifts of creation.



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Some Practical Ways to Be Greener

By Rich Rasmussen

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By now just about everyone has heard or read about the overwhelming concern surrounding global warming or climate change. This topic continues to be controversial as not everyone is convinced that this phenomenon is actually occurring. Even meteorologists cannot agree as to whether this phenomenon is real or not. Despite the controversy, it makes sense that we should take care of our environment. It makes sense that we should do all we can not to waste energy and to conserve it as much as we can.



'Conserving' is not something that our country is accustomed to doing. We are a 'throw away society.' We are also a driving society—we love our vehicles. We love the independence of driving where we need to go. The average person commutes at least one half hour to work every day. Most of us do not want to rely on public transportation, while many of us cannot rely on public transportation. Despite our personal habits and comforts, we are all called to be good stewards of the Earth. This type of stewardship is something that our church has called us to in our most recent history. So, what can you do to help reduce carbon emissions and conserve energy? Below is a list of some very small and practical things that you can do to help.

- Be a smart driver. Make sure that your tires are well inflated, have the oil in your car changed regularly and get regular tune ups. This will help maintain your car's fuel efficiency.
- Support and buy clean, renewable energy. Many companies are now providing ways for you to purchase energy that is produced by renewable sources like wind energy. I live in New York, and have gone with a company that provides electricity that is generated from wind power.
- Replace the current light bulbs in your home with compact fluorescent bulbs. These bulbs are more expensive, however, they draw about one quarter of the amount of electricity as normal bulbs and they last longer. Many of them last for seven years.
- Insulate and weatherproof your home. Also, lower your thermostat. Some sources say that for each degree you lower your thermostat you will save three percent on your energy bill.
- Conserve water by installing low flow shower heads and faucets. Also turn your hot water heater down to 120 degrees. This not only conserves water but can also save you about fifty percent in hot water costs.
- Recycle.
- Plant trees. If you plant them around your home they can provide shade and may help to keep your home cool during the summer, reducing your reliance on air conditioning.
- Write your elected officials and urge them to pass legislation that raises the fuel efficiency of vehicles in this country.
- Purchase energy efficient appliances. My wife and I were at a department store this past weekend looking at new washers and dryers. The manufacturers have done some wonderful things to their appliances to make them more energy efficient. One example is that many washers spin down the load, thereby extracting more water from the clothes. This makes it easier for the dryer to do its job in less time, thus saving energy. Look for appliances with the energy star logo. This takes the guess work out of whether an appliance is more energy efficient or not.
- Unplug your small appliances like toasters and hair dryers when not in use. Even when appliances such as these are not being used they are still drawing electricity. Unplugging them will help conserve energy.



There are now power strips on the market that allow you to plug your appliances into the strip and just turn the strip off. Once the power strip is switched off the appliances no longer draw energy. The average cost for one of these power strips is about fifteen dollars, but you will recoup the cost over time by the energy you save.

Much of the information that I have provided was obtained from the [Sierra Club](#).

Also, [TIME Magazine](#) lists fifty-one things that you can do to help conserve energy and reduce carbon emissions. Please take the time to consider the information provided, and do what you can to be a better steward of this wonderful creation that God has provided for us, and ensure that same wonderful creation for generations to come.

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The Glass Is Always Greener

*By Mary Mueller
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“It ain’t easy bein’ green.” Kermit the Frog has been telling us this for years, and it is certainly true of parish work.



Many of us hear from our teens and parishioners about the overuse of disposable products and other ecologically insensitive, yet cost-efficient practices, of our parish lives. This past fall, our parish offered a seven week adult formation course on the spirituality of the environment. During our time together, our formation team made a commitment to ‘go green’ during this program year.

Here is a listing of some of the specific steps we have taken to be greener at Good Shepherd Parish:

Ask parishioners for donations of dishes, glasses and mugs. We all have collections of treasured mugs; many of us are willing to share them. We received several complete sets of dishes, eliminating our reliance on paper and Styrofoam plates, cups and silverware.

- Make friends with the cafeteria staff. We learned how to use the industrial dishwasher in the school cafeteria. We stack the dishes on a cart at the end of the evening and visit with the cafeteria folks as they are quickly washed and sanitized in the morning. An added benefit: those leftover cinnamon rolls and snicker doodles are now finding their way into the staff workroom!
- Provide recycling boxes for the parish and school staff. The lids from cases of paper are a perfect size. A thirty gallon trash can in the workroom makes for a convenient drop-off site.
- Have large recycling containers dropped off in your parking lot. Not only are we being more responsible stewards, we are making money.
- Shopping at garage sales and thrift stores provided us with tablecloths and napkins. Whoever uses these returns them washed and folded for the next group.
- Invest in a ‘green cart.’ The cart is loaded up with clean dishes and table settings and left in a convenient spot for the staff to access. The only rule is that it be returned, in a clean and ready-to-go state by the next day.



Our experience with ‘going green’ at the parish has been positive. We have built relationships, broken-down some barriers, and even made some money for the parish. With a bit of effort from all of us, our community has, in a small way, found that the glass really is greener on the environmental side of the fence.

For more reading on ‘going green’ as a parish, read about St. Pius X Parish in Mission, Kansas.

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