

Catholic Social Teaching: Care for Creation

Goals

1. To clarify the meaning of the principle of care for creation
2. To apply the principle of care for creation to the problem of global climate change

Begin first by helping participants to articulate their understanding of care for creation.

Ask: What do you think “care for creation” means? Listen for and affirm the following points:

- What God created is good.
- God intends the Earth and its goods for all.
- People have a responsibility to respect – not exploit - the environment.
- Pollution threatens the health of all.
- The Earth’s resources are limited and we need to conserve them.
- The environmental crisis is an ethical one.
- We need to learn more about the meaning and implications of caring for creation.
- Challenges we face in caring for creation are connected to poverty.
- Earth has its own God-given purpose, apart from human use.

To clarify or flesh out the meaning of care for creation, read one or more of the brief quotes that follow.

Quotes about care for creation from Catholic Social Teaching

In our attempt to satisfy momentary wants and desires, we plunder resources and consume energy – resources that belong to all the people of the Earth. And yet, millions of people live in destitution, barely able to obtain what they need for survival.

- *The Social Concerns of the Church, #38*

At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. . . Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose. . .

- *Centesimus Annus, 1991*

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage, which these attitudes cause. 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, 2001*

Assist participants in applying the principle of care for creation to the problem of global climate change by using one or both of the discussion questions that follow.

For Discussion

1. Humans are fully dependent on Earth’s ecosystems and the services that they provide, such as food, clean air, clean water, disease regulation, a relatively stable climate, spiritual fulfillment, and aesthetic enjoyment. The World Health Organization reports that

approximately 60% of the benefits that the global ecosystem provides to support life on Earth are being degraded or used unsustainably. In the WHO report, scientists warn that harmful consequences of this degradation to human health are already being felt and could grow significantly worse over the next 50 years.

In Genesis 9, after the flood it is mentioned five times that "I will make a covenant with you and with all living creatures." How does the widespread ecosystem degradation affect the way you think about stewardship and care for creation?

2. What part of creation in the area you live needs care? A river, lake or ocean? The soil? The air? A furred, finned or winged animal? Farm animals?

Are there any groups actively caring for the place you live? What would it be like to join a group that is caring for creation?

Conclude by asking participants to identify specific actions they can take to apply the principle of care for creation to the problem of global climate change.

Personal choices

Mystics like Meister Eckhart and St. Francis of Assisi remind us that deepening our awareness of creation – thinking of the sun, moon and all creatures as our brothers and sisters – will deepen our awareness of God.

Make a commitment to take a half-hour each week to dwell quietly in nature – at a river, in your back yard, in an arboretum, playing with a pet, bird watching, or simply gazing at a flower in a your home. Turn off your telephone and all other electronic gadgets so your time will not be interrupted.

Consumer power

Take the Energy Star Change a Light, Change the World pledge (2008) at http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=change_light.changealight_index Replace the ten most-used incandescent light bulbs in your home with compact fluorescent bulbs.

Political Action

Organize your group to write letters to your Senator or Representative – or write letters to the editor of your local newspaper.

Using information from *This Is Your Home* presentation or stories on climate change from your local newspaper, ask your legislators to support climate change policies that address the needs of poor people who will suffer the most as a result of climate change.