

Genesis tells us that creation is so good that the very first covenant God makes is not just with humankind, but with all creation (Genesis, chapters 1 and 9).

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have a long tradition of respect for all creation; we shared a deep sense that we were one with the land and sea and with all that lived in and on them. Have we lost some of that sense of respect and stewardship, forgetting that God expects us to be wise stewards of all creation?

Was it this forgetfulness that has led to the depletion of cod stocks; to the fact that we can no longer assume that our ponds, springs and brooks will give us clean drinking water; to the concern that we stand quietly by while a fresh water pond becomes a toxic tailings dump; to the reality that Canada remains the **only** country going to Rio+20 which wants to delete the reference to water as a human right?

In 2002, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople signed a *Declaration on the Environment* expressing concern over ecological destruction caused by economic and technological advancement. The declaration ends on a note of hope; it states:

It is not too late. God's world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future. Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing.

Our Canadian Bishops sent us a *Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative* (2003) entitled "You Love All That Exists... All Things Are

Yours, God, Lover of Life." That letter told us simply, "***The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one.***" It named for us three ways to respond to the crisis:

1. ***Through liturgy, prayer and meditation*** = we are each called to deepen our appreciation of the wonders of nature;
2. ***Through lifestyle changes*** = we can adjust our daily actions to respect ecological limits and to live in solidarity with vulnerable peoples;
3. ***Through community action*** = we can make the links between social and ecological justice more evident – poverty and pollution go hand in hand.

In 2008, the Canadian Bishops issued another pastoral letter, "Our Relationship with the Environment: The Need for Conversion." The letter ends with the words: "Only genuine conversion will help us mend the ruptures and reestablish our life relationship with nature, our sisters and brothers, and the Creator of Life."

These wise words from our religious leaders are part of a growing chorus in the world around us. *The Earth Charter* (2000) reminded us that sustainability is based on three distinct but interrelated pillars: economy, society and ecology. Now there has emerged the possibility of a fourth pillar – ethical and spiritual foundations – which may prove to be the most essential of all.

The United Nations has outlined the eight Millennium Development Goals (2000):

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education

3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality rates
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

The UN set a target date of the year 2015 for the accomplishment of these goals. Sadly, our countries are still far from reaching the targets.

This month we will see another attempt to provide the global leadership needed to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous world for all.

Rio+20 (*the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*) will take place in Rio de Janeiro from 20-22 June 2012. World leaders, with thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other groups, will come together to focus on two themes:

- a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and
- an institutional framework for sustainable development.

These themes are spelled out in seven priority areas: decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans, and disaster readiness.

We add our voice to those who are rallying to encourage their governments not merely to sign documents that promise good things, but to

reclaim and advance an ethical and equitable global vision. We must be attentive to what is happening at Rio+20, in our own country and our own province, in our own local communities and our own homes.

The time is right for us to adjust our way of life to the planet's available resources, to free ourselves of our obsession to possess and consume, and to make personal efforts for the environment. We take to heart and mind and body God's word in Genesis, "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good."

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Here are a few concrete ideas taken from the pastoral letter of 2003 from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops:

- ✓ Set up a study group on ecology in our church.
- ✓ Engage in actions designed to minimize our ecological footprint.
- ✓ Participate actively in the advocacy campaigns of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, and contribute financially to projects for social and ecological justice.
- ✓ Oppose the bulk export of water from Canada.
- ✓ Participate in the ecological justice activities of environmental groups.
- ✓ Assess the energy use of our church.
- ✓ Engage our politicians on the issues of social and ecological justice.

WE CAN ALSO –

Write letters or sent e-mails to our Members of Parliament, to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and to Environment Minister, asking that Canada make its voice heard at Rio+20:

- to ensure that the right to water, sanitation, and food is guaranteed;
- to commit to the principle of *common but differentiated responsibility* being acknowledged and exercised by developed countries;
- to ensure that the voice of the people is heard;
- to reverse the move toward the commodification of nature (e.g., presenting water as an object for sale);
- to ensure that respect for Earth's integral role and harmony with nature in the future sustainability of the planet is upheld.

IF YOU WISH TO WRITE OR E-MAIL –

The Honourable Peter Kent
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Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
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Prime Minister Stephen Harper
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WHAT IS RIO+20?

WHAT HAS RIO+20 GOT TO DO WITH US IN OUR CHURCH?



A MESSAGE FROM

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Newfoundland and Labrador and Leaders of Religious Congregations:
Christian Brothers Community
Jesuit Community
Presentation Sisters
Redemptorist Community
Sisters of Mercy