

## Peace Making: Inherent to Stewardship of the Earth

In a recent newspaper article I was reading about Catholics involved in protecting environmental interests in areas of Latin America, where corporate multinationals are consuming and displacing communities to get at natural resources. It reminds me of my dad, a conservation warden in Wisconsin, who in the 1930's spent endless hours planting pine trees in the northern woodlands stripped by the paper industry. He was one of many young men at the time learning how to reclaim the soil through reforestation.

How do my dad's efforts and the efforts of Catholics in Latin America relate to peace-making? Consciousness of the earth's resources is set in the heart of Catholic social awareness. Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 New Year message to the world said: "*The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development.*" The pope challenges the world, and especially us Catholics, to engage actively in the "ecology of peace" to protect the resources that, once gone, will engender untold hardship on the earth and humanity.

It doesn't take much research to see that in too many areas of the world where natural resources are abused for the enrichment of a few, there are gathered the poorest of the poor suffering as a direct result of that abuse. These are also places where the face of earth is most scorched and damaged. Whether it is oil in Nigeria or Iraq, gold in Africa or South America, wood in the rainforests, or uranium in New Mexico – humanity suffers from deprivation and displacement while the earth is denuded. Terrorism and war follow when opulence and oppression dehumanize the rich and the poor. How does Christian discipleship look in these matters?

If we open our hearts to the first line of Matthew's description of right living: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God,*" (Mt. 5, 9) we see that peace-making calls us to right relationship with all aspects of creation. This is not easy. As Catholics, we must engage in the human endeavor to protect and to speak out for what belongs to us for the good of all. As Catholics we have to see that diminishment in some areas of the earth causes the diminishment of all. Stewardship is not merely taking care of our own backyard, but being engaged in the global ecological issues that challenge the peaceful and harmonious use and replenishment of resources.

Teachers in our Catholic schools have a responsibility to open the eyes of students to an awareness of needs and of taking action. In NCEA's recently published book, *They Call Us to Justice*, we are given the formula to "*observe, judge and act*" (p. 129) as a way to teach our students how to act in light of Christian values. Teachers help students to use the lens of

Peace-making and other Catholic social principles to observe, judge, and act in relationship to what they see.

As parents we have the same responsibility to help our children to “*observe, judge and act*” based on Christian values. Here are some ideas below that might assist you in applying this framework to our responsibilities of being peace-makers and stewards of the earth.

1. Using [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com), find information about Al Gore’s research on global warming. Identify ways that the family can take action in school and community the efforts to stop global warming.
2. Using pictures of the North Pole now and ten years ago, compare and contrast the ecological impact of global warming on animals. Visit a local zoo and observe how animals from cold climates are cared for.
3. Reflect on the importance of caring for God’s creation by taking a family walk through a national or state forest part.
4. Research the life and work of John Muir. Participate in a reforestation project in your state.
5. Identify projects developed by Catholic Relief Services relating to agricultural practices and the environment. Choose a project in which the family would like to get involved. [www.catholicrelief.org](http://www.catholicrelief.org)
6. Write a newspaper editorial on the relationship between ecology and peace-making. Submit the article to the local Catholic diocesan paper.
7. Using the model of “*see, judge and act*,” help family members to become more conscious of making choices based on Christian values, especially in the areas of peace-making and stewardship.

### References:

Mark Storz and Karen Nestor. *They Call Us to Justice: Responding to the Call of the Church and our Students*. 2007. National Catholic Education Association. Washington, DC.

*Esther S. Hicks*  
*Director*  
*Catholic School Identity and Mission*  
*Archdiocese of Chicago*  
*Chicago IL*