

Protection of nature essential to peace

God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 69

By Most Reverend James T. McHugh

Over the past two decades a growing awareness has developed of the need to protect the environment. This awareness has occurred throughout the world, but has been most apparent in the developed countries, especially so in the United States.

Yet this increasing awareness is far from a comprehensive understanding. And despite urgent concerns about specific ecological problems, most people still think of the environment as something detached from their everyday lives and personal behavior patterns. Although some progress has been made, we still have a long way to go in terms of solid political agreements among nations or specific strategies within our country.

Environmental degradation is often claimed to be a natural consequence of population growth. But it is important to realize that the greatest abuse of the environment takes place in the least populated industrialized nations of the world. It is not the number of people, but the processes of industrial production, that create the greatest problem.

The goods of the earth are part of the heritage of the entire human family. They are held in common

across national boundaries and continental divides, and across all economic classes. A collective sense of stewardship, and worldwide recognition of common needs and the common good will enable us to exercise proper self-restraint in the use of natural resources.

In his 1990 World Day of Peace message, Pope John Paul II addressed the ecological question, placing the discussion in the context of humanity's quest for peace.

The Holy Father cited problems that are all too familiar: the unregulated dumping of industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, the unrestricted destruction of forests.

The ordinary person has little or no control over such massive problems, but other aspects of environmental destruction are within our reach. Ride along our city streets and country roads and see the old tires and abandoned cars; the empty cans; the paper and plastic refuse from "fast food" stores; the abuse of trees and shrubs; and the omnipresent broken glass on sidewalks and streets.

Each of these conditions is part of the assault on the environment, and each results from personal carelessness, negligence and arrogant wastefulness. With minimum attention and effort, these situations can be corrected and our daily environment vastly improved.

The Holy Father's address also noted the disruption of ecological balances by the uncontrolled



destruction of plant and animal life, and warned against indiscriminate biological and genetic research, and experimentation.

In search for a solution, the Holy Father pointed to a harmonious universe or "cosmos" endowed by God with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance. This order, said the Holy Father, must be respected and protected. The earth and its resources are a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all.

Protecting this common heritage demands a more internationally coordinated approach to the management of the earth's goods, not only to serve the wealthy, industrialized nations of the world, but also to meet the needs and legitimate aspirations of the developing nations.

We can all do simple things to lessen environmental damage. We can trim our consumption patterns, conserve water and fuel, and cooperate with local recycling programs. Simply put, we can make some small personal sacrifices that will safeguard and enhance the treasures of God's creation.

As Pope John Paul II reminds us, care for the environment is the responsibility of everyone. Protecting the environment protects the common good of humanity — now and for untold centuries to come. God entrusted all creation to the man and woman. We inherit the goods of creation and the responsibility of stewardship. We must pass on all that is good to generations yet to come.

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My Dear People

The American Catholic Church designates October as "Respect Life Month." In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story that focuses on the responsibility human beings have to promote the dignity of life.

The Lord has entrusted us with the Gift of Life. Our responsibility is to cultivate, nurture, protect and defend all life. Yet how many times in today's society do we see this gift threatened?

Life in the womb is terminated, human beings are sentenced to death, nutrition/hydration is withdrawn from the elderly or infirm. Our responsibility — our work is to defend life with all the means at our disposal. As the Gospel story tells us, those who are miserly with life will end up with nothing.

My hope is that we will all accept our responsibility for all human life. I encourage you to follow the **four imperatives** of this year's diocesan "Respect Life" campaign: **Know • Pray • Help • Vote.**

Resolve to be informed about proposed legislation that addresses life issues. Prayerfully reflect on your responsibility for God's Gift of Life. Lend your time, talents and financial support to pastoral care activities. Encourage your government representatives to support legislation that protects the lives of all, born and unborn.

May the Lord who entrusted us with the Gift of Life, continue to give us the strength and courage to "Respect Life."

Your brother in Christ,

Matthew H. Clark

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Magnitude of health-care 'poverty' requires concern, systemic change

In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of absolutely every person, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path.

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The Catholic Health Association

In talking about the health-care poor in this country, it is difficult to avoid political polemics. It is easy to get snagged on quibbles over whether the number is 31 million, 37 million, or even 60 million individuals in the United States who are uninsured or inadequately insured. It is even easier to settle into a heated debate over who's to blame: insurance companies, the government, doctors or the poor people themselves.

The reality boils down to this: every year, more and more Americans find themselves unable to pay for the health-care services they need. Many of them do not even try to obtain health care because they fear being turned away. And the problem is no longer isolated among the traditional poor, the homeless, the unemployed. Almost three-fourths of those without health-care insurance are workers or their dependents. The middle-class population is increasingly threatened.

Although often the target of frustrated blame for health-care costs, many hospitals are increasing



their work on behalf of the health-care poor. In addition to providing charity care — in which no bill for services is ever created — hospitals are developing low-cost clinics, outreach programs, and financial assistance to help the needy. Other educational efforts focus on early intervention before health problems become severe and costly. Yet the sheer numbers of the health-care poor mean that hospitals can't solve this problem alone.

Many Catholic hospitals are among those in-

creasing services for the poor. A 1989 survey by the Catholic Health Association showed an increase in such programs, with more than three million people being served. Catholic hospitals also are developing partnerships with parishes to help serve the poor. It is estimated about one-fourth of U.S. parishes have programs to help the poor.

But such programs and their sister efforts are not enough. This nation's current health-care system and its Medicaid program are not enough. Medicaid coverage of the poor has been decreasing since 1975, when it covered 63 percent of the poor; today, only 40 percent of the poor are covered.

Catholic health-care providers are among those looking toward reform of the health-care system as the ultimate solution. Recently, the Catholic Health Association adopted a set of principles to focus the effort. Among these principles is a reaffirmation of health care as a basic human right. The principles also acknowledge that each person shares the responsibility of maintaining his or her individual health as well as the health of the society of which he or she is a part.

The Catholic Church teaches us about the preferential option for the poor, which calls us to see our society as the poor sees it. It also calls us to listen to their voices and act on their behalf. It reminds us that we belong to one another and that we are responsible for each other.