

Walter E. Grazer



CATHOLICS
GOING
GREEN

A Small-Group Guide for
Learning and Living Environmental Justice

© 2009 by Ave Maria Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except in the case of reprints in the context of reviews, without written permission from Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556.

Founded in 1865, Ave Maria Press is a ministry of the Indiana Province of Holy Cross.

www.avemariapress.com

ISBN-10 1-59471-210-7 ISBN-13 978-1-59471-210-4

Cover image © Jupiter Images Unlimited.

Cover and text design by Andy Wagoner.

Living the Message features by Jerry Filteau.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.





Preface	4
Using This Booklet	7
Session 1: We Walk on Holy Ground	11
Session 2: We Honor the Dignity of the Human Person	24
Session 3: We Stand in Solidarity	35
Session 4: We Share the Goods of the Earth	47
Session 5: We Champion the Cause of Global Human Development	58
Session 6: We Answer the Call to Conversion of Life	71
Resources	85
Additional Prayers and Psalms	88



SESSION 1: WE WALK ON HOLY GROUND

*God looked at everything he had made,
and he found it very good.*

—Genesis 1:31

Setting the Stage

How powerful this simple statement from Genesis is! So powerful that a fundamental teaching of our Catholic faith rests upon it. We believe that God is the creator. And, we believe, as the first book of the Bible tells us, that God found what he created to be very good!

In fact, you and I often share God’s point of view. We find our world absolutely beautiful . . . and, of course, “very good.” Have you ever looked up at the night sky and felt awed by its immensity and beauty? Or, have you watched, with childlike fascination, as a bee went about pollinating a flower? Or maybe you once climbed to a mountaintop. Exhilarated, you looked out in every direction to find a beautiful world spread out below. Many people call these unforgettable encounters with nature “God moments.”

The Catholic Church takes this idea about the goodness of creation much further. The Church says that every part of creation is sacred or holy precisely because God has created it. In the sacramental worldview that forms the heart of Catholicism, creation is sign of God’s presence and abiding love for us. As

such, it is worthy of our profound care and requires our able stewardship.

Obviously, encountering God through nature is different than encountering God through the seven liturgical celebrations we call sacraments, or through the scriptures. Nevertheless, nature remains an important source of spiritual well-being in the life of the Church, and careful attention to our role as stewards of the Earth provides direction in the moral life of Catholics.

In the first Christian centuries, the sacramental vision of nature was much stronger than it is for many Christians today. Deeper Appreciation for nature was seen as learning about and drawing closer to God through the created order. Today, fueled by recognition of the current environmental crises, many Catholics are renewing this ancient vision. This renewal is evidenced in many places by the bold manner in which increasing numbers of Catholic parishes celebrate our sacramental and other liturgical rites. We see increasingly vibrant celebrations of baptism, confirmation, eucharist, rites of anointing of the sick, weddings, and funerals. All of these use things of the Earth such as water, bread, wine, oil, and fire—to point us toward God, present among us and loving us. We are a sacramental people, finding signs of God in all things—most fundamentally in the things of nature.


Recall an experience of nature that made you feel like you were on “holy ground.” How was this a “God moment” for you?

Think of the sacramental elements of water, bread, wine, oil, and fire. Talk about what one or two of these say to you about God.

In modern times, the understanding that our earth is holy ground has faded for many of us. Our understanding that we should be gentle stewards of the earth has become distorted. There are many reasons for this shift. For one thing, we live very different lives today. Most of us are no longer so closely connected with the earth. Most people in developed nations are disconnected from agriculture and other work directly tied to the earth. School children too often are amazed to learn that their supermarket apples didn't come from the apple factory, but grow on trees!

Because so many of us live and work in ways disconnected in conscious ways from the earth, we have a greater inclination to unknowingly or carelessly neglect or misuse this holy ground. Air pollution, global climate change, dirty and unsafe water, toxic waste, and many other environmental degradations confront us. In so very many ways, we are failing to be good stewards.

There are so many frightening signs that our earth is facing devastating problems. We can help by recapturing a deeper and closer connection with our earth and its needs, and by making some simple changes in the way we live that will allow us to become good stewards.



Did You Know?

In 1862, when Abraham Lincoln was president of the United States, 90% of Americans were farmers. Today, only 2% of the U.S. population works as farmers.

statements by the U.S. bishops, and pastoral letters by bishops individually or in regional groups have provided rich resources for Catholics to reflect on the environment and their responsibility to preserve and protect it.

Butkus says: “The reason we’re doing this is that it goes back to Catholic mission and identity . . . the whole Catholic principle of sacramentality. Creation is a medium through which sacred reality is encountered. From the perspective of spirituality, it’s developing the consciousness that God is revealed in creation.”

Did You Know?

Americans spend about \$11 billion a year on bottled water. It takes 1.5 million barrels of oil—enough to fuel 100,000 cars for a year—to make the plastic bottles to meet Americans’ demand for bottled water, according to the Earth Policy Institute, a Washington, DC, environmental think tank. Only one in five of these bottles are recycled.

What local environmental issues are you aware of?

What specific concerns do you have about them?

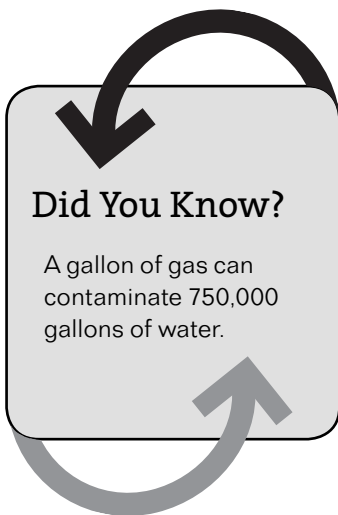
What Can We Do?

No doubt you are learning more about environmental justice in our world. However, the environmental crisis is a huge and complicated issue. It’s hard to know where you can help. Read

through the following list of local activities and home-based projects that can help to restore the environment in small ways. Discuss these Action Options with your group as time allows. Then choose from the list or add your own ideas as Action Commitments for the week. Write your commitments in the spaces on page 22 and discuss your progress the next time your group meets.

Action Options

- Research environmental issues in your own ZIP Code area at the EnviroMapper website: www.epa.gov/compliance/wherelyoulive/ejtool.html.
- Recycle at home and help organize efforts at work and school.
- Stop buying bottled water if possible. Use a reliable home filter if you are concerned about your local water supply. *Consumer Reports* magazine can help you find a quality product.
- Support local park and wildlife resources.



- Take time out to sit in your backyard with friends and family. Appreciate the beauty of nature close to home!
- Learn more about your local watershed and ways you can protect it.
- Spread the word about the dangers of pouring antifreeze, oil, or other chemicals on the ground, into storm sewers, or down the drain. Take these toxic substances to your local waste disposal facility.

- Start using organic cleaning products such as lemon juice, baking soda, and vinegar. Or, use biodegradable cleaning products.
- Stop using chemical pesticides—try natural products instead.
- Let part of your landscaped gardening grow freely with wild flowers and other plants native to your zone.
- Consider planting local species of trees near your home, or donate and plant trees at your parish or another location in the community.