



STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION IN WISCONSIN

INTRODUCTION

Wisconsin is blessed with natural resources and natural environments that both inspire the imagination and generate economic activity. The state's economic well-being rests, in large part, on the health and well-being of our natural resources. Wisconsin's \$51.5 billion agricultural industry continues to be the largest industry in the state, employing one out of every five workers. Numerous state industries depend on sustainable forests and clean water. Tourists come to Wisconsin to recreate and immerse themselves in the natural beauty of our lakes and landscapes.

Wisconsin can be proud of our longstanding commitment to the preservation of our natural resources. However, as the economy becomes more globalized, citizens move out from urban centers and technology continues to advance, the state must respond to new developments and seek policies that recognize our obligation to defend Wisconsin's land, water and air for future generations.

A CATHOLIC ECOLOGICAL ETHIC

In his 1990 message delivered for the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II focused on the problem of ecological degradation, stating that "...there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and...the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations."

The pope emphasized that the ecological crisis *is* a moral issue. Exploitation of the earth's natural resources is tied to the exploitation of people in need. Those without political and economic power are those that are most likely to live in environments that suffer the scars of reckless development and the blight of toxic air and water. Indeed, "respect for life, and above all for the dignity of the human person, is the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific progress...no peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation." (World Day of Peace, 1990, #7)

Echoing the call for people of good will to address environmental concerns, the US Bishops in their 1991 statement *Renewing the Earth* emphasized that "in our own actions and choices, our communities, our work and our public policies we should affirm a Catholic ecological ethic that upholds the goodness of all of God's creation." The bishops enumerated some fundamental principles regarding creation and the linkages between human life and the natural world. These principles, in turn, have led to a broad policy framework encompassing four priority areas:

- Environmental justice: emphasizes the strong link between social justice and environmental protection, with relation to the needs of the poor;
- Sustainable development: emphasizes that social and economic development should not only protect the sustainability of natural resources, but also promote a just distribution of these resources today and for future generations;
- Worker protection: insists that workers' needs should not be sacrificed at the expense of environmental protection or vice versa; and
- The "commons": calls for protecting vital global shared resources such as the oceans, land, waterways and fisheries. (Source: USCCB, Environmental Justice Program)

SOME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN WISCONSIN

Agriculture. The principles of Catholic social teaching point to valuing sustainable farming practices. The teaching particularly affirms moderate-sized, family-owned farms because these farms are more likely to be responsible stewards of the land and enhance promotion of the common good within local communities. While many of the economic hardships facing the small farmer today are the result of federal and global policies, as well as the choices of all of us as consumers, there are opportunities to promote reforms in Wisconsin that can educate consumers about agricultural issues and modify the state's approach to agriculture in ways that affirm financial and environmental sustainability.

Land Use. While economic growth and development advance the common good by enabling individuals to work to meet their responsibilities and share their gifts, we should manage and plan growth to ensure that economic interests are properly balanced with long-term environmental and community concerns. Effective land use planning enables communities and individuals to envision future growth that reflects their values. Both the principles of subsidiarity (which values local decision making) and solidarity (which affirms the interconnections between people and places, both local and global) are affirmed by organized land use planning efforts, such as Wisconsin's Smart Growth initiative.

Children's Environmental Health. Nationally, a coalition of Catholic organizations including the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Health Association, the National Catholic Education Association, the National Council of Catholic Women and Catholic Charities USA, among others, have banded together to advocate for public policies and programs within their own institutions to reduce environmental threats that are particularly hazardous to children. Children, both born and unborn, are far more susceptible to the effects of toxins in air, food and water. Exposure to mercury, certain flame retardants, lead and pesticides, for example, can lead to adverse health effects in children as their bodies grow and develop. Wisconsin legislators are advancing a number of proposals to decrease the presence of these substances in Wisconsin's environment.

ACTION REQUESTED

Urge policymakers to incorporate a "stewardship ethic" into their public policy deliberations and debates by considering principles of:

Sustainability: Development decisions should consider the social and environmental costs of proposed economic activity.

Concern for the poor and vulnerable: We all consume energy and generate waste. The environmental and public health costs of these actions should not be borne disproportionately by certain individuals nor certain communities due to poverty or lack of political power.

Subsidiarity and solidarity: Those who own land and who live in local communities should have a say in decisions about future growth and development, because the use of local lands directly impacts the livelihood of the individuals residing there. However, this local decision-making should be balanced with the broader social responsibility to preserve the "commons," which are held in trust for future generations.

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