

Bethel College Mennonite Church Creation Care Committee

Stewardship Note # 40: Creation Care Sunday Statements

June 2011

This Stewardship Note consists of the five short presentations made during Creation Care Sunday, May 1, 2011. The theme of the service was “Living for Tomorrow”. Since the future world is being created by the current older generations, we asked the senior high members to ask some questions to which they would like representatives from the older generation to respond. Here are the responses.

Questions from BCMC Senior High Youth

What decisions have you had to make regarding the environment in your life?

What things have you done to help creation?

What things have you done to hurt creation?

What have you done to fix the things in creation that you could have hurt?

What are some tough choices you have had to make about whether or not to do something that is Eco-friendly?

What have you done at (Home/Work/School, etc) that has affected the environment?

What decisions have you made about food that have affected the environment? (Organic, Local foods, etc.)

John Pannabecker, Grant Writer, Hesston College

Response: On fossil-fueled transportation and gardening

First, the church community: I'd like to thank Mark Kreider and Nat Dick for helping me haul horse manure. To Harold Thiessen for the horse manure. To Dave Kreider for the use of his pickup truck in exchange for homemade bread. And to Ben Kreider in the past for enlightening me – that working with manure helps young people develop strong immune systems.

How do we help creation here? We minimize our carbon footprint because growing plants in the garden absorbs carbon dioxide, produces oxygen, and reduces our need for importing food. But here's the paradox. Horses and manure contribute to greenhouse gases - as does the truck. We can't do much about horse physiology and manure decomposition, but the truck? I could use the horse and a cart. But then Harold would have to help me with the old technology. I chose the truck, the easy choice – but a symbol of fossil-fueled transportation.

Another example of choices. A few months ago, in the joint Sunday school hour, the youth discussed how we don't talk about money. In 40 years, Rachel and I have spent less than \$20,000 total for all our motorized vehicles, the first 5 years using a motorcycle. (This dollar amount will increase substantially when we purchase a different vehicle.) The choice to minimize our vehicle purchases minimized the carbon footprint of car production, which represents about 25% of the overall automobile carbon footprint. On the usage side, we've driven 5 to 6 thousand miles annually over the last 10 years. This choice is linked to finding a compromise of trips to visit family, energy consumption, and meaningful work – about 1-1/2 work load for us as a couple – with less income and uninspiring vehicles, but more exercise and time together, better communication, and for me, a lot of travel in France – in books and online.

We each need to work out these choices in our own way, but within the church community we can start to question whether unlimited travel should be an entitlement.

Glen Ediger, Director of Design, Vornado Air LLC

Look around! What do you see that has been designed? Everything you see, except skin and these flowers, has been designed, fabricated, marketed and purchased by someone. We cannot escape it.

For example this podium, someone decided on its shape, size, material, and finish. Someone chose Oak, it's attractive, easily fabricated, has a warm feeling, and it comes from a renewable resource. It was probably a good choice.

Well, I am one of those people who make those types of decisions every day in my work designing consumer products. Even though I am just a resident here in North Newton, the decisions I make daily have an environmental impact around the world. This is both intimidating... and an opportunity.

The youth question is: What are some tough choices you have had to make about whether or not to do something that is Eco-friendly? This hits me smack where I work. The consumer wants products to buy, the retailers want new products to sell, and our company wants more products to grow the bottom line. What can I do to have some peace of mind that I am helping more than hurting?

I can't say that the decisions are ever easy, I am certainly doing some good and I am certainly doing some environmental damage. While most products are designed for a short life cycle, I try to design products that last many years. I try to use materials that can be recycled and place recycling marks on the products. I try to make products that can reduce home fuel consumption by localizing comfort to just the room you are in. I design products that create jobs for workers here in Kansas as well as other parts of the world, which does stimulate the economy. I try to design products that make people comfortable, I can make an impact.

But! I also play directly to the consumerism of the American public, I create products that consume large amounts of petroleum based plastics, and metals that are strip mined around the world. I cannot buy a screw, a power cord, a heating element, or an electric motor made in this country, so we consume more energy just getting it here from overseas. Not all of our products can even be made cost effectively here in Kansas, about 1/3 are, and about 2/3rd's need to be manufactured overseas, where there are even more lax environmental controls.

The economics of mass production have deep roots since the Industrial Revolution; mass production of products with large distribution networks has been the economic structure that has flourished. Capital investments are made in factories that produce products to grow the financial profits of individuals and corporations. The system is based on growth, not sustainability. As the system has evolved consumers have become even more demanding in craving new products, manufacturers have become more aggressive in providing those products, and retailers are more aggressive in marketing those products, everyone is in a growth pattern...it's the system.

It may be time to find new ways to an "economy of sustainability". Some companies are starting to function with zero growth objectives. This is a radical change and will not happen fast, but it may be inevitable.

My life is full of good and bad, I don't have it all balanced. I struggle with decisions every day at work, and at home, but I can keep trying to make a difference. While these are all subtle changes, that's really all I can do, I do feel some guilt about my work, but I also feel pride in the comfort giving and long-lived products we do make. How are you doing in your work or school...are you creating positive or negative effects on the environment, what more can we do?

Valetta Seymour: From a Health Care Perspective

I am speaking this AM primarily to the youth who have asked us questions, and in preparing this reflection, I realize that I often find it difficult to feel positive about the future health of our planet. On a daily basis, I live with a certain amount of angst about what the future holds for you, and I understand that the worries I have are a result of the misdeeds of my generation. And I fear that my generation will pass along values to you that are not in keeping with good stewardship of the earth.

As a Nurse Practitioner, I witness every day the powerful truth that how we live matters. What we eat and drink, how much we exert ourselves, whether we choose to use tobacco, how much we sit in front of screens, how we relate to those around us has a tremendous affect on our health, and I spend a whole bunch of my time as a health provider hoping to affect the choices of the patients I see so that they will have healthier outcomes. I tell them that these choices are far more important than any pill I can give them.

And how we live matters to the health of our environment, how we live matters to life everywhere. It bothers me that every time I drive my car, I contribute to global warming, and that can threaten the homes of people living on the other side of the world as sea levels rise. I choose to drive a fuel-efficient car, but if all the cars on earth were as fuel-efficient as mine, the problem is still not solved. So how do we overcome this problem that we are living unsustainably and contributing to the declining health of this planet? There is no pill to fix the mess we've made.

I think we have to act with hopeful responsibility. One of the most important and gratifying decisions I made many years ago, even before I was married and had a family, was to work part-time so that I did not have to be a slave to the world of convenience. This gives me time to grow a large garden, preserve much of this food for the winter, bake all of our bread, cook healthy meals(which takes time), hang out our laundry(I don't use a clothes dryer), and walk the prairie that surrounds our home. I know I still drive too many miles in a car. I could do with many fewer possessions.

As I take those walks on the prairie, I experience the metaphors that connect me to the Spirit - wind, sunlight, soil, deep roots, beautiful grasses and flowers, insects with all of their fascinations, and I feel guardedly hopeful about the future that is before you.

Lorna Harder, Environmental Biology Instructor, Hesston College

Ecologist Colin Townsend (2007) writes, "*Homo sapiens*, the name of the most recent line of hominids, might well be considered a misnomer. Just how sapient (wise) has *Homo sapiens* been? We have certainly been clever – inventing an array of tools and technologies from the wheel to nuclear power station. But how much of the natural world has been disrupted or destroyed during this technological progress? And is our way of life actually sustainable?"

I am a member of the species, *Homo sapiens* and I have to ask myself how different I am from other species. Certainly other species are capable of polluting, disturbing and destroying habitat. For example:

- Burrowing animals toilet outside their burrows to avoid their own waste.
- Beavers build dams and prairie dogs build underground towns.
- Elk and moose overgraze meadows
- Seeds hitchhike with migrating birds to invade new habitats.
- Plants produce their own fertilizers and pesticides.

Could I not say that pollution and disturbance and destruction are normal for all living species? Yet I as *Homo sapiens* am joined by 6.7 billion others, and we come fully armed with technologies. Simply put, with our numbers and our technologies, we have overwhelmed Earth's systems.

The crunch question for me – what is left for descendants of our species and the descendants of other species as well? How do I live to ensure that those descendants of ALL life on Earth have adequate resources? What is reasonable behavior on my part?

Ecologists Michael Cain, William Bowman and Sally Hacker (2011) suggest eight thought-provoking ecological maxims that often serve as my guide for everyday decision-making.

1. You can never do just one thing. Events are connected. What affects one organism or place will no doubt affect another organism or place.
2. Everything goes somewhere. There is avoidance and there is denial, but there is no “away.”
3. No populations can increase in size forever, and that includes *Homo sapiens*.
4. There is no free lunch. Energy and resources are finite and every activity bears some cost.
5. Evolution matters. Organisms continually face new challenges in a dynamic world and they must change to persist.
6. Time matters. The world that we know is the result of events that have occurred in the past. Similarly our current activities impact the future.
7. Space matters. Organisms can be impacted by events that occur at the local scale as well as the regional and global scale.
8. Life is impossible without species interactions. All species, *Homo sapiens* included, depend on one another for energy, nutrients, and habitat.

So, it ends up being a process of thinking consciously about consequences for my day-to-day routines and activities, and then choosing:

- hanging wash;
- turning off lights and the energy vampires of our electronic technologies;
- using less water indoors and out;
- biking and walking;
- recycling everything possible;
- buying products that pollute less, and that degrade quickly and naturally;
- growing, purchasing and/or harvesting local food resources,;
- buying less or better yet, not buying it at all;
- investing in solar energy;
- landscaping with native plants...

...and the list continues.

However, beyond preventing or reducing the pollution, disturbance and damage, we must also think and act restoratively. Restoration of one small patch of Earth can begin the process of healing for Earth’s living communities, and that includes *Homo sapiens*!

Many times I fail in my efforts to lighten my footsteps. Cultural and personal habits push back, overriding “doing the right thing.” But new habits do emerge as I continue to live more consciously, parsing needs from wants. Sustainable living draws me closer to all of Earth’s citizens and it is hopeful living. I am buoyed by the possibilities. I think the human species has the capacity to work and live sustainably, but we must also have the will to do so.

John Waltner, Harvey County Administrator

As I thought about the assignment for today’s service—to reflect on Creation Care in light of my work with local government here in Harvey County—I was first struck by how seriously many local policy-makers take their jobs. For years, I’ve worked with elected officials in this region. They are keenly aware of the long-term implications of many of their decisions. I know that we sometimes make mistakes and do things that seem not to make much sense, but, for the most part, elected officials are very aware and deliberate as they make policy that will affect future generations.

In that light, I'd like to briefly share about a county project that affects our environment in a significant way. If you live in a typical central Kansas household, you and your family generate around 1.2 tons of household trash each year. In this part of the world, our disposal method of choice is to landfill that trash—to bury it. Your trash is picked up, taken to our transfer station, dumped on the floor, loaded into a semi-trailer, hauled to Reno County, and finally buried in their landfill. In Harvey County, we spend approximately \$600,000 annually to transport and bury that trash in Reno County.

Every landfill, even if built to the latest federal standards with compacted soil and polyurethane liners, will eventually leak. When that happens, highly toxic leachate—the “sloppity slop” or “gloppity glop” that the Lorax spoke of—which collects at the bottom of the landfill will leak into the groundwater below. That, in turn, will create a huge environmental problem for future generations to clean up. There is no simple solution to this problem.

For over a decade, the Board of Harvey County Commissioners has sought ways to treat trash as a resource instead of merely as a nuisance. We have talked to inventors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and companies large and small, about a variety of strategies and technologies. In retrospect, some proposals have been hare-brained and a few of the promoters have been the equivalent of modern-day snake oil salesmen. We are, however, currently in discussion with a solid, reputable Kansas renewable fuels company to see if we can cost effectively install a gasification unit which would break down trash through a thermal process and form a gas which could then be used to power large Caterpillar-type engines to produce electricity to power homes and businesses. The residue from this process would be a largely inert ash and reduce what needs to be buried in a landfill by about 80%.

We know that this process would still produce some damaging emissions, but the environmental impacts would be greatly reduced. This project is still a work in progress, but we are optimistic and remain hopeful.