

## Wonder

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Title: **Practical Suggestions for Environmental Stewardship**

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Reflecting on my own practice of what it means to have a Christian relationship with the earth, I always want to act in a manner grateful for the wonders and beauty of creation. In this context, I can diligently pursue everyday practices and see them directly affect the relationship I have with God.

Psalm 19 begins “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, there are no words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the ends of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, there is nothing hid from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect; reviving the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, the precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart...”

This selection is read throughout our services as a community, and in our own prayer life. One way of thinking of the creation is not just through scientific eyes, but by edifying God through the practical applications of our prayers and worship. Here are some easy, everyday ideas that work in our home:

**Visiting Thrift and Second Hand Stores** -My husband and I thought we were just being cool and hip when we first decided that we would shop at thrift stores regularly, but living sensibly and without a “consumption” mentality is truly an old, Christian ideal.

**Buy local**, to reduce our carbon footprint as well as support local farming. We joined a CSA in New York City, Community Sponsored Agriculture, where the focus is equally on local and organic food as it is in building community between the farmers and neighbors who buy in to the share.

**Public transportation** is harder for some areas of the US- but we were very fortunate to use the trains, buses, or walk as much as possible since being married, even in our first year with no car at all. Even now, in New York City and Westchester, there are clean energy, hybrid buses used for daily commute.

**Keeping the Fasts**-According to Environmental Defense, if every American skipped one meal of chicken per week and substituted vegetarian foods instead, the carbon dioxide savings would be the same as taking more than half a million cars off of U.S. roads. A disturbing fact mentioned in a UN Report in 2006 regarding consumption of meat is that 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from livestock (more than from transportation). The livestock sector accounts for over 8 percent of global human water use, while 64 percent of the world’s

population will live in water-stressed areas by 2025. These problems will only get worse as meat production is expected to double by 2050.

I appreciated what Dr. Elizabeth Theokritoff wrote when she said, “We worship as a community, not as individuals; so a liturgical ethos is also one of sharing. Long before the earth was seen as a whole from space, the Church knew that we stand before God together, and that we hold in common the earthly blessings that He has given to mankind and all creatures. “Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs,” Saint John Chrysostom reminds us. This principle, applied to the whole range of natural resources, is particularly relevant because the global environment is squeezed on two sides: by the over-consumption, greed and waste of the affluent, and by the pressing needs of the poor, often forced to deplete the land around them for the sake of food or fuel in the short term. Equitable sharing with other people does not only involve using less of finite resources. It also precludes enjoying conveniences and luxuries for which others are having to pay the hidden environmental price, living with the toxins used in their manufacture and the pollution caused by their use and disposal.”

This leads me to the second reason we practice responsible stewardship of the environment, love for the other. St. John Chrysostom’s appeal to our own greed reminds me of everyday decisions even at a grocery store. Why would you buy Fairly Traded coffee that’s 2 or 3 dollars more than the regular kind? In my mind you have two choices: You can either buy a product that was produced with certified ethical practices, guaranteeing payment of the farmers who grew it for you, or you can purchase another product that costs you less money, but doesn’t give that same promise. If one pays the farmer fairly, and the coffee is grown in an environmentally responsible manner, how could there be any other choice? Understanding that your money is not really yours, the responsibility to “Think Globally and Act Locally” becomes a spiritual mandate challenging us to have these issues on our mind.

“In an age when information is readily available to us, there is surely no excuse for ignorance or indifference. To overlook is to shut our eyes to a reality that is ever-present and ever-increasing. Former generations and cultures may have been unaware of the implications of their actions. Nevertheless, today, more perhaps than any other time or age, we are in a unique position. Today, we stand at a crossroads, namely at a point of choosing the cross that we have to bear. For, today, we know fully well the ecological and global impact of our decisions and actions, irrespective of how minimal or insignificant these may be. It is our sincere hope and fervent prayer that in the years ahead, more and more of our Orthodox faithful will recognize the importance of a crusade for our environment, which we have so selfishly ignored. This vision, we are convinced, will only benefit future generation by leaving behind a cleaner, better world. We owe it to our Creator. And we owe it to our children.” ( His All- Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch on the day of the Protection of the Environment, September 1, 2004)

Six years later, let us pray that we continue to educate ourselves in such matters, and challenge ourselves to act accordingly, with grace and courage to the Glory of Jesus Christ and His creation.

Some useful websites:

Thrift Store Finder: <http://www.thethriftshopper.com/>

Our local CSA : <http://www.norwoodfoodcoop.org/>

A local CSA finder: <http://www.localharvest.org/>

Fair Trade USA 3rd Party : <http://www.transfairusa.org/>

Carbon Calculator: <http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/carboncalculator.cfm>

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**Discussion Questions:**

Does our faith come with a mandate to behave a certain way towards God's creation?

What can you do in your life and community to promote environmental stewardship?

Dr. Theokritoff promotes "equitable sharing with other people". Is that analogous to modern communism? Why or why not?

Are the author's suggestions helpful? How many of them can you easily adapt in your life?