

Cultivate God's Presence by Susan Burns,SFO  
Care for Creation at Our Lady of the Fields, 1070 Cecil Ave., Millersville, Md. 21108

In "Laudato Si" Pope Francis tells us, "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, His boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains everything is, as it were, a caress of God." Pope Francis encourages us to listen both to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (#49 Laudato Si) This is what the Care for Creation Ministry has set out to do.

The Care for Creation Ministry at Our Lady of the Fields was formed in 2014 as an outgrowth of the Franciscan Course C4C, Care for Creation. No one in the course was an expert, but everyone contributed toward understanding the Course teachings. With the sessions completed, we shared the decision to continue our collective formation of God's free gift of Creation, to continue learning about the growing abuse of God's Creation, to continue learning what can be done to increase the sustainability of the earth for future generations, and to continue seeking ways to educate our brothers and sisters.

The culture of our world is to allow the worldly values of profit, possessions, pride, consumerism, self-reliance, etc. to dominate our lives as opposed to God's values, lived by our Brother Saint Francis, of love, charity, generosity, humility, community, etc. The dominance of worldly values has led to excessive consumerism in the use of fossil fuels to energize our needs, to excessive use of insecticides and pesticides to maximize the yields of produce and to kill off "unwanted" vegetation, to excessive amounts of trash and use of plastics and other non-biodegradable materials to meet our needs of convenience, etc. Our excessiveness has led to climate change, pollution of our watershed, pollution of our environment, which in turn jeopardizes the sustainability of God's Creation.

God created all Creation, all in balance. Humans, with their worldly values, are killing God's perfect Creation. But our faith gives us hope. Following the Gospel messages of Jesus, we can convert the dominance of worldly values to God's values and work to reverse the destruction of the earth, making God's Creation sustainable for our children, grandchildren and all future generations.

***A Honey of a Story*** – bees provide pollination for 70% of the food we eat, but they are dying off at an alarming rate from pollution, GMOs, and reduction of nectar producing vegetation. At Our Lady of the Fields the honey bee aviary was started in the Spring of 2015 with 2 hives. A 3<sup>rd</sup> was purchased and a swarm was caught in 2016. One of the hives was lost in 2016 and queens were replaced in 2 hives but still about 80 pounds of honey was sold at the Parish Picnic in September 2016. In 2017 the hives look strong now, but it isn't quite spring. A package of bees is on order to create a 4<sup>th</sup> hive. In 2017 the hives were treated for mites with an organic vaporizer.

***Protection of the Chesapeake*** – rising temperatures create melting ice caps creating rising sea levels flooding the wetland areas destroying the natural filtration system and killing off numerous species, run off from the misuse of insecticides, pesticides, and fertilizer pollute our watershed, removal of trees and plants remove the natural filtration system. At Our Lady of the Fields, there are plans to create a memorial garden after the removal of the invasive Bradford pear trees, bee friendly bushes and shrubs to assist in the filtration of the runoff from the parking lots, and the possibility of rain barrels to water the shrubs and flowers and foliage.

***Opposition to Fracking*** – pressurizing water over miles of underground pathways to extract natural gas has resulted in excessive use of water in drought stricken areas, corrosion of the transport structure,

methane contaminated water ponds, contamination of the water table, use of funding for fossil fuel production instead of renewable energy sources. We also oppose the construction of the XLPipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline in support of our brothers and sisters Native Americans at Standing Rock, North Dakota. Water is life.

**Waste Management** – reduce-reuse-recycle, composting, replace the use of man-made products that have long shelf-lives like plastic or Styrofoam that never decompose. Our Lady of the Fields supports our efforts to become a “GREEN” Parish. Recycle tubs, already in use in the hall and kitchen, will be in place in all the classrooms. Two Care for Creation drawings were selected from Faith Formation to be printed on Our Lady of the Fields Cares for Creation totes, on sale for \$2.50. Our Lady of the Fields Care for Creation travel mugs are on sale for \$5.00. The parish supports our efforts to use only recyclable eating utensils or better still to use reusable, washable utensils and to use Fair Trade products that are not only farmer friendly, but also organic and shade grown.

**Changing Ecosystem** – a study of the perfect, in balance nature God had created corrupted with the dominance of worldly values with the industrial revolution and cultural change in society. Each one of us is called to do something to reduce the demand for the use of fossil fuels and to explore the use of renewable energy. Commercial agricultural practices such as the excessive use of deforestation, pesticides, insecticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, and hormones pollutes are waterways and oceans and kills off the natural biodiversity way of sustainability negatively impacting the food we eat, the water we drink, and the sustainability of the world’s ecosystem.

**Straw-Bale Garden** - in 2014 the Care for Creation Ministry at Our Lady of the Fields began the cultivation of the Straw-Bale Garden, providing fresh, organic vegetables to the guests served a meal in Baltimore through the Breaking Bread with the Hungry Ministry. The garden addresses an issue of food safety. The vegetables grow abundantly in a natural environment of straw, sun and organic fertilizer without insecticides or pesticides. Providing fresh, organic vegetables to the poor addresses the social justice component in Caring for Creation. The poor are disproportionately adversely affected by the destruction of the environment. The poor tend to live in more commercial areas which have higher incidences of air pollution. The poor tend not to buy filtered or bottled water and are, therefore, subjected to pollutants in the water table from unfiltered run off. As a result, the poor experience higher levels of respiratory, dermatological, and intestinal diseases; such as asthma and cancers. Less than healthy conditions among poor women of child-bearing age result in higher incidences of physical and learning disabilities in their children.

Thirty-six bales of straw were planted in 2014 and a few hundred pounds of vegetables were produced. In 2015 we planted 71 bales and had second plantings in about 20 bales. More than 500 pounds of vegetables were taken to Baltimore where the guests could select their own as in a small farmer’s market. In 2016, 82 bales were planted and volunteers were recruited from the parish to assist. In 2017 the plan is to have 108 bales to support Breaking Bread with the Hungry and SPAN, Serving People Across Neighborhoods. Home gardeners are being encouraged to share their insecticide/pesticide free vegetables.

**Pollinator Garden** - In 2015, a pollinator garden of nectar producing perennials and annuals of plants indigenous to Maryland was planted near the bee hives and straw-bale garden. A bench was added under the mulberry tree, where the bees had swarmed, and the garden area took on a peaceful ambiance where one can pray, meditate, and enjoy God’s creation. All are welcome to enjoy the garden.

**Fair Trade** - We've been selling Fair Trade coffee, teas, and chocolates for about 10 years. Fair trade certification means a fair wage, fair loans to support production, fair labor practice ie. no slave children, and fairness to the communities ie. better and improved water sources. The fair trade products we sell are organic as well, just like our garden! The coffee beans are shade grown too. We are environmentally friendly as well as farmer friendly. We sell the products at hospitality the 4th Sunday of each month. We also sell the ***Our Lady of the Fields Cares for Creation*** totes (\$2.50) and mugs (\$5.00). The designs on the reusable totes were created by Faith Formation students. As with waste management, we would like all ministries to use the fair trade coffee. Fair trade hears "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

**Education and Advocacy** - 2017 the Care for Creation Ministry is working with Faith Formation to incorporate the issues in caring for the gift of creation God has provided into the Spiritual education of our youth and the Parish. The Parish is working with Interfaith Partnership for the Chesapeake and for 2017 is supporting the following legislation in Maryland:

### **1. Ban the Foam**

This bill calls for a ***ban of all polystyrene foam (Styrofoam)*** to be used in packaging food at schools, universities, restaurants and non-profits such as churches. A ban on foam packaging peanuts is also called for. Foam products including packaging peanuts could not be sold. Styrofoam releases low levels of carcinogens when used to contain heated food. 80% of the trash in our water comes from food packaging, and 40% of that is polystyrene foam. Polystyrene foam does not decompose and it breaks up into small pieces as it sets in the water. These particles are ingested by fish and become part of our food and water consumption cycle. Alternatives would be paper or re-cyclable plastic. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis call us to be ***Responsible Stewards***. Being a responsible steward is **NOT** looking at only the dollar cost.

### **2. Clean Energy Jobs Act**

This bill was passed in 2016 but vetoed by Governor Hogan. The bill calls to ensure Maryland obtains ***25% of their energy from renewable sources***, up from the existing 20%. The Governor vetoed citing an increase to utility cost to Maryland residents, but the increase would typically be less than \$.50/month. Clean energy jobs would be created and as the supply of renewable energy increases, the cost should decrease in the long run. With the reduction in the use of fossil fuel energy, we could expect cleaner air and water. The House voted to override the veto on Jan. 31<sup>st</sup> and the Senate should be voting soon.

### **3. Fracking**

A two (2) year moratorium on fracking in Maryland is due to expire in the fall of 2017. Fracking pumps water, sand, and undefined chemicals in a web-like underground network. The pressurized compound blasts the natural gas from inside the earth and is extracted in a few pumps on the surface. The results have been adverse health effects, increased climate disruption, and water contamination. There are numerous infrastructure problems with fracking. And, although the initial set up calls for more employment, there are few residual jobs. Fracking is banned in Anne Arundel County already. This bill would ***ban fracking State-wide***. Also, we should be looking for cleaner, renewable energy sources and not increase the fossil fuel production.

### **4. Antibiotics in Agriculture**

This bill would ban the routine use of ***antibiotics in animals***. Cattle, pigs, poultry, etc. raised for consumption are routinely fed antibiotics to plump them up rapidly and to prevent diseases caused by the cramped and unsanitary living conditions that the animals endure. In humans, the over use of

antibiotics kills off the weaker strains of disease and leaves us with “super bugs” resistant to more and more antibiotics. Every year at least 2,000,000 people in the US become infected with antibiotic-resistant infections with at least 23,000 dying. Similarly, in agriculture, the weakest “bugs” are killed off and the strong survive in the animals’ meat that humans eat and in the animals’ waste that pollutes the water we drink.

#### **5. Forest Conservation Act**

In Maryland, forest had covered 95% of the land. Today forest cover only 39%, less than half. The Forest Conservation Act would apply to development projects greater than 40,000 square feet. Under the current legislation, developers are required to replace destroyed forest at the rate of only 1/4 of the acreage lost. The new bill would require 1 for 1 replacement. **Trees are "Creation's Cure-all"**. They provide native habitats and food sources for thousands of species, sequester carbon dioxide which causes global warming, provide cooling shade, and slow down rain water getting it back in the ground instead of running into streams and storm drains.