

May 15, 2016 Categorized notes from the Conversation on Care for Our Common Home with three circles

Note from editor Bev Hunter: These notes should be interpreted only to inform about and reflect what is the state of mind and values of the participants in this conversation at this time and place, regarding what we can and should do to care for our common home, the planet earth and its creatures and fellow humans. I have placed individual statements into rough categories just for ease of comprehension.

Pope Francis and the Encyclical Letter

Paragraph 139 “goes right to the heart of the matter.”

The paragraph was difficult to understand.

In encyclical: Technocratic paradigm. The belief that technology is not the answer to global warming and climate change is wrong – it can play a part but it alone cannot solve those problems.

In reading the encyclical, too many abstractions. “Nation” is made up of “people”.

Pope Francis has touched people and made connections to many.

Pope Francis insists that we have this conversation. We all have ideas and experiences to share. Not everyone will come to a fire hall to have the conversation. We need to take the conversation into many other venues. Have the conversation with people it is not easy to talk with.

Concerning Our beliefs and motivations for this conversation

Those of us who are comfortable wish to improve conditions for our children.

We believe in social action and environmental concerns.

Some are scared about what we are leaving for future generations. How will there be enough green jobs for next generation?

Local supervisor wants to hear our concerns.

We are hopeful and positive re the future

Another is passionate about not destroying the natural world. We are one tiny part of the universe but our planet is all we have and we have to take care of it.

Earth is special - floating in universe, tiny speck – our only chance as people is to do something right here on earth.

- Rappahannock has special energy

- In the past, people had less comprehension of how things worked together; human lives were shorter. Social system didn't place as much value on the earth.

Spiritual value – imagine framing a large puzzle with value in all viewpoints. Beautiful fabric of interlocking spiritual meaning.

- This is a bottleneck century, and we're racing against time.

- Can't keep everything for self and shut out others. Money/resources need to flow.

What is single most pressing problem?

People in the group were asked to express their single most pressing issue.

These included :

Climate change

Population density vs. sustainability

Denial in the face of evidence (taking time for the 5 stages of grief)

Political expediency vs. the overall good

Teaching children about nature and the environment in time for critical change

Materialism

Current belief as a place to come from (each individual must approach problems from their own point of view because opposition creates resistance)

- Interest in pollution of rivers

- Importance of expansion of consciousness; can't separate. Mountains are spiritual

- Need to see our interconnectedness

- Respect for interdependence, web of all existence.

- Need population control. We are part of nature.

Problems from climate change and pollution

Melting glaciers cause a lot of erosion problems. (seen in Peru by one of us)

Pope talks about man-made pollution and natural pollution, like that from volcanos.

Biggest pollution problem – limit carbon buildup in atmosphere and oceans.

Traffic jams are a big source of pollution, burning fossil fuels, wasting energy and human time – but telecommuting helps.

Need more busses, improved train transportation.

What about carbon caps? They might help with global warming.

- Earth 2100 CD commented on Easter Island – what was the person thinking who cut down the last tree? Survival, but good metaphor for our earth.

The poor are hurt first and worst by climate change – sea level rise, storms, flooding, drought and famine, war.

Crisis in Syria triggered by long drought, farmers going to cities (Sunni/Shia).

- USDA program Hubs – developing techniques to cope with climate change. It's real; going to happen.

- Insurance rates going up; businesses aware.

- Navy bases flooding with sea level rise and storms.

- Climate change is the reality now – how do we cope?

- The World Bank used to do a lot on hydro power; causes other environmental problems. Now they are working on climate change adaptation. Recently did a \$1 billion project in China.

- Not as much mention of climate change itself. Nature doesn't negotiate.

Overpopulation

There are too many people for the earth to sustain.

Dense population creates pressure on society.

- Contentious issue with population control; Encyclical says that's not the issue – sharing more equitably is.

- If we don't take care of the population, nature will take care of it for us.

- Education especially for women helps decrease population naturally.

- Catholic teaching is that abortion is wrong, and some birth control. See p. 50. American Life League – son dedicated his life to saving human beings.

- Tension between different views – responsibility to respect the environment and life; Catholic views, other faith views, secular.

The population crisis is part of the root of the problem – too many people on the planet, resources spread too thin. Try to decrease birth rate. Need maternal/child health care, birth control. Also need education, especially for women/girls. Successful program in Bangladesh cut birth rate from 7 children per family to 3. But not moving fast enough - historically famine, war, and pestilence has cut populations.

Beyond the local, worldwide We cannot ignore the problem of overpopulation.

The planet is fighting back – rising sea level, desertification, rise of diseases.

Overpopulation goes hand in hand with poverty.

Plan B 3.0 tells story of how a nation that wants to bring down population growth can do so quickly. Birth control, education of girls,

On the other hand, with more people you have more ideas to solve problems.

Prediction – 80 percent of population will live in urban areas within 20-30 years.

This may be a self-regulating mechanism.

Food supply and agriculture

Book “Omnivore’s Dilemma” points out many problems with our food production systems.

We need more local and regional agriculture. This engages more people in food production, decentralizes it, and potentially on a smaller scale can be less polluting.

We need to investigate new ways of food production to be efficient on a smaller regional scale.

Buy organic, local agriculture. Sustain local ag.

Why buy California vegetables that need irrigation there, and transportation, when we here have plenty of water for growing veggies?

. Poor neighborhoods have few choices of healthy food. They have mainly fast food places.

In cities, even affluent people have hard time finding healthy food.

Why not have food stamp program partner with fast food stores. Use the food stamp debit card to buy fresh food at the fast food place.

National geographic had a year-long series on food problems and availability around the world.

We can all grow food for the Food Pantry (Plant a Row for the Hungry).

Complaint by a food pantry volunteer that too many of the patrons of the Pantry bypass the healthy vegetables and pick up the processed grains.

Next Food Pantry needs to have a kitchen to demonstrate how to prepare healthy foods.

Also demonstrate how to grow food in the planters at the food pantry.

NE store purchases less-than –perfect food that might have been throw away and sells it much cheaper , helps poor and less food waste.

- Senior thesis at Wakefield – growing food in the future; figure out weather. GMO can be used without damaging environment.

Education

Teach young children about health and environment and they will teach their parents.

He'd like to see a "full court press" to educate all. An imbalance results if all are not taught about environmental issues.

Wakefield Country Day School recycles, used to have a garden, environmental science class, envirothon, field trips like the RappFlow demonstrations at the Sperryville Schoolhouse site.

Kids see interconnectedness of nature. Scientist develop teaching materials for 4 year olds, e.g. "what does water like?"

A teacher of young children teaches about plants and animals to kids.

Get the kids into the garden.

The Governors School focuses on environmental topics. Such curricula should be expanded to enable many students to study these topics.

Washington Carver school in Culpeper is being developed with a focus on farming and environmental issues. Land donated by local family. Center-based school for people from surrounding areas, and to foster local food processing industries.

Farm to table program in Rappahannock is alive and well.

RCHS also has culinary program.

People interacting with nature

First issue: humans must constantly engage with nature in order to care for it. How do we do that in a world where more and more are living in cities? And in cyberspace?

Humans are a part of nature. "One big soul" as Steinbeck said in "The Grapes of Wrath."

- We interact with animals – they are intelligent; we need humility, part of the network of life. Think of our grandchildren and future generations.

Interact with nature – she wanted to bring kids to the country from inner city to experience nature – but neighbors objected so it didn't happen.

Can't there be opportunities to bring people from city to nature and its beauty.

Unitarians in Boston started "Green Sanctuary" – 12 green projects – kids, community, etc.

One local project is gleaning at Waterpenny. Unpicked vegetables are harvested by a team from UUBridge and donated to food pantries.

He sees addiction to technology as a real problem – visit to national parks are down because people are more interested in their devices than spending time outside in a beautiful setting.

- American Indians (some only – were different) thought about being part of nature and doing no harm to seven generations. (“Mother Earth, Mother Earth, what’s a home for our children worth?”)
- We need a paradigm shift. Struggle for survival against nature (as pioneers thought) is antiquated. They thought nature is so big – what damage can I do?
- Responsibility, partnership and stewardship vs. exploiting nature – we have to manage transition.
- “The Man Who Planted Trees” – helped streams.
- Brought back wolves to Western parks. Huge positive improvements in ecosystem.

Third World Issues

Pollution in developing countries is difficult to address. Because the development is driven by economics.

Education denied to a lot, especially women in third world countries.

Women in general are subject to abuse

Can be helped by educating

An example of how the poor impact the environment because of their situation: in Haiti they cut trees for charcoal for cooking.

Balance nature and needs of people – tough in third world nations.

Visited the Galapagos Islands – picture of the environment, uniqueness. Ecuador showed tension between needs of the poor, environment. They are also aware of conflict between protection of the environment for tourism vs. income from fisheries or oil

- Peace Corps Volunteer in Malawi '93-96; 6th poorest country, raped of trees, soil runoff. People have to survive, need wood.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is important – survival first. Money also siphoned off for corruption.

- asked about other sources of fuel.
- Need to kill and cook animals if we’re hungry.
- Successful programs: Some AID, World Bank, Heifer program – get food for your family and pass it on (ducks). Bill Clinton; Feed America Network. SELF = Solar Energy Light Foundation.
- Need vaccines, irrigation.
- Can’t eat raw rice; need fuel.

In Nepal, deforestation threatens erosion, floods. Kerosene costs and is a fossil fuel.

Consumption and waste

Recycling center in County – thanks to our county administration

All products come in plastic. What will we do after oil is gone?

Conspicuous consumption, that is buying the latest gadget which might shortly ends up in a landfill, is a problem

Capitalism and Democracy

The focus on profit motive in capitalism does not help most people.

Corporations are part of the problem. Purpose is to make lots of money with little regard for employees and environment.

Do we need a hybrid of democracy and socialism?

Democratic socialism may be one solution.

The point was made that people need freedom and flexibility to address economic and social conditions in individual ways. For example, after the wall separating East and West Germany came down. East Germany, with its State run economy was terribly polluted. This in addition to the way the State run system had exploited the people of East Germany as well. In contrast, in the Galapagos fishing as tourism, was freely chosen as a source of income.

Politics and participation

The needs are so big we need large scale solutions and policies as well as local/individual efforts.

Political situation and denial is big problem.

He could have joined the KKK when he was younger and living in Rappahannock.

We have to understand own prejudices, and confront them.

A person has no right to complain if they don't engage politically. Participate in political process to get things done.

Politically we are tending towards the middle range of balance. In the 1960's and 70's there was political support in U.S. for environmental protection. Recently the pendulum has gone far in the other direction.

A pressing issue is the way our democracy works -- money drives politics.

Our problem has been political. Politicians deny climate change for their own careers' sake.

Concern about PACS that influence congress to sustain their industries, often to detriment of environment.

Alternative Energy sources and Saving Energy

Solar may replace (much of) oil consumption.

Gas is cheap now, but we need to raise taxes on gas and use the money to repair infrastructure.

Friends on Carribean island cook with solar, not charcoal from island trees

An article in the New York Times said that the action that would minimize an individual's carbon footprint was to minimize or eliminate flying to destinations.

But long security lines and unpleasant flights will cause people to take fewer flights.

Fuels: When gas was expensive, alternative fuel sources were explored to a greater extent.

Now gas is cheap and there is less emphasis on these lower carbon impact fuels.

We cannot demand that fracking stop (why??)

We can bring up the topic of better internet in Rappahannock at public meetings such as Supervisor's meetings, to focus attention on this issue and so that telecommuting is available to more .

PD9 – Address transportation solutions regionally. Get a bus in Rappahannock.

Water supply

Water is critical issue in the world

Social problems and Inclusion of the poor

- This speaker sees people with little education or who look of a lower social status who are treated badly, e.g. medical insurance and Emergency Departments.
- A speaker is now retired and on social security and can't afford to live where they were working.
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- Transgenders in bathrooms. Fear causes problems and unfortunate responses. Attitudes change with time.
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- Need to hear about advances and creative solutions to social problems – e.g. Salt Lake City – cheaper to build housing for homeless than to finance their problems on the street.
- Homelessness might have different causes.

- A lot of people will fake it because they don't want to be complaining
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- Social problems – takes brains a lot of careful thought and planning to be effective.
- We can help social problems.
- We have been stupid – should notice divisions – economy, behavior

- Media won't report on the poor. Will hear about sensational stuff but not real problems we face

Been working with homeless for 15 years.

- One program – educating students (?)
- Important for leaders to be educated about how to treat those they serve because they come in with a bias
- Started to change, expand, reflect on her biases so she could help students – need to listen
- Those served need to tell me what they need
- Creating a voice together – not dictate to others
- Projection of bias creates fear

There should not be “shame” on people who are asking for help.

He sees income inequality as a part of the social problem. It can be helped by fair salaries.

Poor don't fall into same category – they're poor for different reasons, like lack of education, poor parenting, health problems, loss of employment, substance abuse.

BEACON program at Benedictine Sisters in Bristow helps immigrants learn English to help their children. Teacher of immigrant children concerned about kids having healthy food.

Person who works with immigrants is impressed with their courage.

Problems arise from the answer to the question “what is the purpose of human life?” Pope Francis says we need to have a proper grasp of man's purpose. This would lead to treating others with human dignity.

No man is an island. No problem can be solved unilaterally.

It is expensive to be poor. Difficult to be conscious of environment. It is a full time job just to survive for poor people.

Free food should be easier to get.

Environment can be harmed “by accident” when you are poor.

Survival of the fittest with regard to humans is not a useful idea.

Everyone in world should have equal access to resources to fill needs in Maslow’s hierarchy.

When basic needs are met, people can grow personally and spiritually, become self-actualizing.

Another works improving the lives of people with low incomes in Rappahannock and would love ideas as to how to improve their lives and thereby help with the social aspect of the discussion.

Problem with housing for low income in Rappahannock

If I were czar – guaranteed minimum income and no other social supports like food stamps or Medicaid. Finland is doing this. But people leave Finland due to high taxes.

He asked: what does it take to be an artist in Rappahannock? Agree to lower standard of living.

Growing up his family didn’t have a lot of money but lived well grew food, etc. He thinks people then lived better than those in urban or suburban areas now.

Balance

When we hog things, balance is disturbed. Results in problems between haves and have nots.

Pope Francis says we need to balance social and environmental concerns. e.g. farmers using fertilizers that pollute the Bay, need alternatives to remain viable.

Movie “A Beautiful Mind” is about balance

War is an example of waste of resources.

- Very sad – N. Dakota Native American tribe deciding to frack, knowing it goes against their wisdom. Pulling the rug from under their feet. Short term solutions to problems that are going to kill us.

Individual action

I have to start with me, control what I do.

Do what we can in our own house, property, community, state.

Recycle, compost, eat less meat.

What I can do and what is a waste of time?

- Tiny car
- Grows own food, no fertilizer but manure
- Plan trips to store
- Some items of “trash” can be recycled, or used by someone else
- Oil can be recycled

Youth and environment

Younger people are becoming more environmentally conscious. Its now cool to care.

Humans have good attributes – but many of us tip the balance negatively.

Migration of people due to drought and starvation and war. What percent of migrants will survive? Where will they go?

Young people think it is cool to be environmentally conscious. “Grandmother, you don’t own the tree.”

The Generation turning 18. Environment is their main issue, he says. That’s why Bernie sanders was popular with millennials. He was perceived as pro-environment and more income equality.

Ways to help others

- Important for leaders to be educated about how to treat those they serve because they come in with a bias
- Started to change, expand, reflect on her biases so she could help students – need to listen
- Those served need to tell me what they need
- Creating a voice together – not dictate to others
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Tackle social issues first

- Teach how to be truthful
- Czar has to be attentive. know what’s going on as second nature

Some organizations addressing global environmental and social crisis are:

UNICEF

Peace Corps

Solar Energy and Light Fund (SELF)

The Heifer Project

World Bank (combat poverty and protect nature by empowering women)

Water resources (Over 87,000 water user associations currently exist in China)

Sierra Club

People in this Conversation

international travelers/workers, nurses, environmental activists, State Dept, Navy, World Bank,

Mental health professional does emergency evaluations

Person with lots of children

Leader of an environmental protection organization

Farmer

Supervisor rapp. County

Former Member of Rappahannock county Planning Commission

Teacher of young children

Benedictine educator

Has lived all over the world

Recent college graduate

Homeowner who just put a solar electric system on her home.

A practitioner of an Eastern religion

A young person self-classified as poor

Person who has Been working with homeless for 15 years.

A grandmother who lives close to her grandchildren

A food pantry volunteer

Travelled recently to Peru and saw melting glaciers

One high school senior

Several People aged 60's or 70's.

A native of Rappahannock County.

One Madison resident,

one Front Royal resident, remainder Rappahannock residents.

All retired except student and Fr. Tuck.

This was a very diverse and well traveled group. A number of individuals had direct experience of cultures around the world including Russia, Nepal, the Galapagos islands and other places in South America.

Mother Earth song

Oh my children, can't you see

You destroy yourselves, destroying me?

Fragile planet, blue and bright,

Shining against the endless night.

Mother Earth, Mother Earth,
What are life, peace and beauty worth?

Many a green and fertile land
Lies wasted in concrete, trash, or sand,
While human blindness, greed, and pride
Poisons the land, seas and skies.

Mother Earth, Mother Earth,
What are life, peace and beauty worth?

Come, my children, it's not too late;
But no time to lose, no time to wait!
Work together, find a way
To care for the earth for your children's day.

Mother Earth, Mother Earth,
What's a home for our children worth?

Let children grow safe, and forests green;
Dolphins play, and birds take wing;
This hope for all God's family –
Earth be healed, at peace and free!

Mother Earth, Mother Earth,
What's a home for our children worth?
Mother Earth, Mother Earth,
What are life, peace and beauty worth?

By Judy Reidinger

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