

Linking Global Solidarity and Care for God's Creation

Patrice Schwermer

For those of you who have traveled by jeep in Haiti you may not believe this, but the road to Fonds Verrettes is even more treacherous than those in the central plateau. One stretch is bad in particular because it is a dried up path of destruction resulting from a torrential rain and flood several years back. In fact the result of this devastating mountain side flood was the reason I was visiting Fonds Verrettes with Catholic Relief Services. This small corner of Haiti encapsulates a complete picture of the environmental devastation evidenced though out the country.

With scant resources available and the need to survive, Haitians turned to their trees, cutting them down to make charcoal to sell for profit and to use for cooking. Their actions resulted in the widespread deforestation of Haiti. So extensive was the erosion in Fonds Verrettes that when the rains came it caused the powerful flood which rushed down the mountain side taking with it the entire village.

The scene created a clear picture of the consequences of deforestation and the resulting erosion. Not only was human life swiftly taken the night of the flood, but life continues to be taken every day in Haiti. Without vegetation, soil erodes leaving the land barren of topsoil and the water contaminated from the erosion run-off into the rivers and streams. People are left vulnerable to the life threatening effects of food insecurity and unclean water.

I was overwhelmed with pain and even a bit of a sense of hopelessness upon seeing the environmental disaster and its consequences. Upon reflection and prayer I knew I had a faith responsibility to become educated and respond.

The Diocese of Richmond is blessed to have twinning relationships with communities in Haiti. Through these relationships we have come to understand Global Solidarity: we are all connected in a mutual web of life; what affects one of us affects all of us. As Children of God we are sisters and brothers in Christ.

The Earth's environment connects the people of the world perhaps more intricately than anything else. We breathe the same air, share the same supply of water and experience interconnected weather systems. The Catholic social teaching principle of Caring for God's Creation is clearly one of the most significant implications of taking seriously Global Solidarity. How we all care for our Earth affects us all and our common destiny.

Impoverished nations must take responsibility to care for their own land. Education of children, school gardens, protecting trees and finding alternative fuel sources are among the steps these countries need to take. With commitment and hard work these steps can are and being taken in Haiti. As I rose higher into the mountain of Fonds Verrettes I saw this hopeful reality.

Following the great flood of Fonds Verrettes the people, with the help and technical support of Catholic Relief Services, are re- building their community and healing its environment. Efforts to stop and reverse the erosion are evidenced on the hill sides with the planting of trees, creation of biological barriers and planting of gardens.

Just as impoverished countries must take responsibility for their part in caring for the environment so must wealthy countries acknowledge and change their relationship with creation and the world's poor. 80% of the world's resources are used by 20% of the world's population leaving 20% of the world's resources for 80% of the people. There are enough resources for every one on the Earth to live a dignified life. There is enough food grown to feed every person on Earth a diet of 2,300 calories per day. But in this reality, almost 16,000 children die every day around the world from hunger-related causes--one child every five seconds. If everyone on Earth used the amount of resources that people do in the United States we would need 2 and ½ more globes to support us all.

Many of our choices as individuals and choices as a nation can affect the very survival of those around the world. Wealthy nations have a responsibility to do everything possible to assure the well being of our sisters and brothers in impoverished countries and a continued healthy Earth able to support us all. As individuals we can recycle, reduce and reuse to lessen the amount of resources we utilize leaving a fair share for all. As a nation we can reduce emissions to lessen pollution of the air we all breathe, and reduce global warming and its negative effects especially burdened by poor nations with weather systems affecting their ability to grow food.

A faith response to care for God's creation from both impoverished and wealthy nations will ensure the health and well being of all. When wealthy nations reduce pollution and emissions, and when impoverished countries, particularly those with a plethora of forests and biodiversity, care and protect their land, all will benefit. The Earth will possess the needed vegetation for a clean, healthy atmosphere and also the environment to sustain biodiversity that can lead to scientific discoveries. When wealthy nations use only what they need and not all that they want, the material poverty of impoverished countries will decrease. Additionally, the roots of the spiritual poverty of the wealthy will be addressed including consumerism and individualism that leads to the painful spiritual ills of emptiness, addiction and isolation.

The twinning ministry at its core, embraces the fullness of the meaning of Global Solidarity. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that we are inescapably, interconnected in a web of life, what affects one member affects all; my well being depends on your actions, and your well being depends on my actions. In other words, my care of God's creation affects your well-being and survival, and your care of God's creation affects my well-being and survival. Taken one step further, our care of God's creation as a Global Community affects our common human destiny. Together we are responsible for the well-being of the Earth God has given to us as gift. Let us continue to answer the challenge of our faith with our sisters and brothers in Haiti as we care for each other through our care of Creation.