**JAEI ENVIRONMENTAL CORNER**

# *Celebrating a Season of Creation*

**Need – not Greed**

***(***Taken from ***Season of Creation: Book 1)***

|  |
| --- |
| ***‘Ah you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land’.*** *(Isaiah 5:8)* |

Eternal God

you crown the year with your goodness

and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season:

grant that we may use them to your glory,

for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being;

through Jesus Christ our Lord

*Amen*

**A**ristotle wrote that there were two basic economic systems we could follow – the need system or the greed system. It would be disastrous if we followed the greed system. This would produce inequalities that would result in unrest and conflict. … Guess which system we have followed!

The Old Testament is filled with God’s call for righteousness, justice and equity, particularly economic justice.

The Old Testament prophets strongly condemned those who exploited their workers, failing to pay them their wages, or cheated people with the weights when buying their bread, or moved fence posts to cheat their neighbour. The Old Testament prophets’ call was for fairness, so that all might live together in harmony and peace. We believe that God provides for our need not greed. When God led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt and fed them with bread from heaven, he commanded the Israelites to “gather as much of it as each of you needs” … They did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, “those who gathered much had nothing over, those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as they needed.” (Exodus 16 – 17). Moses told them not to hoard, but some people ignored his command. In their greed they gathered more than they needed. By the next morning what they had hoarded was full of maggots and beginning to smell.

The tenth commandment clearly warns us of the danger of covetousness: *“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave or ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” (Exodus 20:17).*

Our present economic system encourages us to break the tenth commandment, to covet our neighbour’s car, house, or flat-screen TV, to buy and consume what we don’t need. Our present economic system is based on constant growth, which requires more and more production and poverty in the world than ever before, at a time when the world knows greater wealth than ever before. We have the greatest economic injustice, insecurity and unrest ever, at a time when we could position to provide for the needs of all.

Some people have benefited immensely from the capitalist system and have become hugely wealthy, but the price has been increasing economic injustice. While the richer get richer, both the poor and the environment suffer and are increasingly exploited. Nature is hitting back because of our ruthless, selfish and greedy exploitation of nature and natural resources. Why is this happening?

Greed is one reason. We continue to exploit the natural resources of the world without regard to the future or the sustainability of renewable resources. Clean air, water and healthy soil provide our life support systems. We cannot continue to pour poison and pollution into our air and water with the excuse that cleaning our emissions would reduce our profits. We cannot continue to destroy our topsoil through some of the practices of huge commercial farms. Topsoil remains South Africa’s biggest export – into the sea! We have to start looking after our life support systems, even if this costs us more.

A second reason is that the poorest people have been forced to exploit their natural resources beyond capacity, having no option but to plough on inappropriate mountain sides, or cut down the last tree and destroy the forests of the world, or use unsustainable fishing practices which destroy the fish stocks. Such poverty need not exist if we establish greater economic justice.

These inequalities exist between nations as well as within nations. The rich, developed northern nations are intent on protecting their access to natural resources, particularly oil, and fail to see that the economic gap between rich and poor is a major cause of global instability. The countries where there is the smallest gap between rich and poor are the coun tries that are the most stable and peaceful in the world. Are we surprised? There is no excuse for the rich nations to continue to hold the poor nations hostage to unrepayable debt, incurred when cheap oil gave rise to unrealistic “development” schemes. There is no excuse for the “developed” North to impose so-called “free trade” on the rest of the world, while at the same time subsidizing their own agricultural production. In some countries, cows are subsidized by more than $3 a day, while a billion people in the world live on less than $2 a day.

When we share the abundance of God’s creation equally, we undercut the temptation to covetousness. God’s plan is that we may have *“life in all its fullness” (John10:10)* God wants us to fulfil the potential he has given us. That means that in order to grow up as a healthy person, we need the essentials of nutritious food, a safe and secure home, clothing and education. With these we can begin to fulfil the potential god wishes for us. If we don’t know where our next meal is coming from or we have no drinking water, sewerage or sanitation, we struggle to reach our God given potential. All of these could be provided if we had a more sharing society and overcame the world’s present economic injustices. Fulfilment in life comes from our relationships, with God and with one another - the people we love and with whom we are in daily contact. We need only the essentials of life. We will not find happiness or fulfilment in the excessive ownership of material possessions. Rather than looking for solutions through consuming more, we should use the resources God has provided to improve our education systems, health and hospital care, sanitation and water supplies, essential housing and public transport. Most important is that each one of us is able to receive education that will enable us to take responsibility for our lives, for one another, and for God’s world.

Prof. Wangari Maathai, the first African woman and the first environmentalist to receive the Novel Peace Prize, says that if we want peace we must have democracy, human rights and equitable access to carefully sustained natural resources – so that we may all take responsibility for our lives. While politicians squander natural resources and wealth, or while powerful nations try to control the natural resources of the world, we will not find peace. Peace will come from knowing god and sharing the abundance of resources with one another as we seek to establish justice and live in harmony with God’s creation.

The world cannot continue with the present level of inequality, economic injustice and environmental destruction. That the world’s richest should control more than 80% of the world’s wealth is not only iniquitous, it is unsustainable and cannot lead to peace. That some CEOs earn ten thousand times more than their workers is immoral. Somewhere, somehow, the leaders of the world have to bring about greater economic justice, not only within nations, but between nations. A more human face has to be brought to the capitalist system, one that recognizes that people and their natural environment are more important than profits. A start needs to be made with what is called “Triple bottom line accounting” which considers not only the financial position, but also the social and the environmental costs. The value of our natural systems is worth billions of Rand, yet we take for granted clean water, air, soil and the natural cleansing processes of nature. These are now being overloaded so that we now have “dead” lakes and oceans and toxic lands.

Waste and pollution are among our most serious sins before our God who provides for our need, but not our greed.

|  |
| --- |
| **Facts - Consumerism, poverty & environmental degradation** |

There is no way that urgent and critical need for poverty alleviation and demand for a better standard of living by an escalating human population can be met by the limited resources of our planet. Nor can the planet cope with all our waste. More of the same ‘business as usual’ will not change anything because there is no longer enough to go round. We will have to find ways of shaping and distributing resources more equitably. People in the developed world must change and reduce their wasteful consumption habits. It is also imperative that we radically transform our discriminatory economic system which benefits those who already have and marginalises the poor and the environment. We cannot address poverty before we take care of creation - poverty alleviation and environmental care go hand in hand. We can all change the way we do things locally and globally. Because we are people of faith, we have a moral obligation to do this.

|  |
| --- |
| Poverty is “human condition characterised by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.” - Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001. |

|  |
| --- |
| *“Human rights cannot be secured in a degraded environment. The fundamental right to life is threatened by soil degradation and deforestation and by exposure to toxic chemicals hazardous waste and contaminated drinking water. Environmental conditions clearly help to determine the extent to which people enjoy their basic right to life, health, adequate food and housing, traditional livelihood and culture. It is time to recognise that those who pollute or destroy the natural environment are not just committing a crime against nature, but are violating human rights as well.”*  *Klaus Teopfer, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme 2001*  *“Freedom alone is not enough without light to read at night, without time or access to water to irrigate your farm, without the ability to catch a fish to feed your family.” Nelson Mandela.* |

* One child born in an industrialised country will consume and pollute more in his or her lifetime than 30 to 50 children born in a developing country.
* Almost half the people on earth (nearly 3 billion) try to exist on the equivalent of R12 per day.1.1 billion of the absolute poor in our world live on R6 per day.
* Approximately 18 million South Africans (45% of the population) live in poor households that earn less than R352 per adult per month. Power relations in poor households may be characterised by violence, fear, food insecurity, exploitative work and other pathologies. 3 of every 5 children in SA grow up in poor households. .
* There are 8.4 million children in slavery – trafficking, debt bo ndage, forced labour, though the slave trade was abolished 200 years ago.
* One third of the maize grown in the USA is now used for bio-fuels, to fill cards with fuel. The US bakes its bread with other people’s maize.
* 1.7 million children die each year due to poverty.

|  |
| --- |
| **What can we do?** |

* Buy things for their usefulness, not their status.
* Learn to share what we have
* Develop a healthy scepticism for advertising – live within your means; bless God for what you have.
* Think about the lifecycle of what we buy – where it comes from and where it will end up.
* Develop a habit of giving away.
* Learn to enjoy things without owning them􀂇
* Buy things that can be recycled.
* The Bible condemns usury – endorse a just economic system, ethical investments and fair trade. Pay fair wages.

|  |
| --- |
| **Facts** – **Waste** |

In nature there is no waste, everything is recycled. Waste is a problem that humans have created. Waste is something that must be disposed of because nobody wants it at a particular time.

But one person’s waste is another’s raw materials. If we are to live sustainably, products need to be designed in such a way that when they are no longer useful they can be dismantled so that the materials can be used again. We have the technology to do this but we don’t have the will to do it because it does not generate profits for shareholders! We need to lobby for a policy in which the ‘polluter pays” We are addicted to our ‘throw away, disposable, fast food’ culture. This behaviour is contrary to the laws of nature – contrary to God’s laws of creation.

* Greed and injustice are bound to lead to conflict and war. Military spending by the top 7 countries is $805.9 billion. (USA $528.7 billion) The USA spends only one thirtieth of that ($16 million) to address poverty. This is a gross misuse and waste of precious resources. If half military expenditure were directed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and overcoming environmental degradation, we would meet our targets. Security won’t be found in weapons but in seeking and establishing God’s justice on earth.
* *“Administer true justice, show kindness and compassion to each other.”* ***(Zechariah 7:9-11)***
* *“A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.”*
* ***(Psalm 33:16).***
* **20% of world citizens, who are the ‘consumer class’, eat 45% of all the meat and fish consumed, own 87% of all the cars and use 84% of all paper and 75% of all energy. In the process, they generate 75% of the global pollution.
* E-waste from electronic and electrical appliances contains valuable materials like copper and silver as well as toxic (poisonous) substances like mercury and lead. Our 21st century infatuation with gadgets like cell phones, computers and batteries makes disposal a growing problem. Mountains of e-waste from 1st world countries have been shipped to dumps in developing countries where there is less strict legislation regarding the handling and stripping of hazardous waste.
* Ten times more oil reaches the seas from car owners pouring old engine oil down drains than from oil tanker disasters that pollute miles of coastline and kill thousands of seabirds.
* The average pregnant woman has at least eight pesticides in her placenta.
* There are approximately 46 000 pieces of plastic floating in each square mile of our oceans. Turtles, bags for jellyfish and squid. It is dolphins and killer whales can choke or starve by confusing plastic It is estimated that plastic kills 1 million sea birds 100 000 mammals and countless fish each year.

|  |
| --- |
| **What can we do?** |

* Become an informed consumer. When you buy something, think about the materials used in its manufacture, the environmental impact of the manufacturing process, the transport ‘miles’ used to get it to the marketplace, the impact of using it and the harmfulness of its disposal.
* Walk the talk – share with others how you are trying to reduce your impact on the earth.
* Participate in a recycling scheme or start a recycling depot at your church, school or in your community. Where possible, recycling glass, tin cans, plastic, paper and cardboard. The energy saved by recycling an aluminium can is enough to run a TV for 3 hours.
* If possible, compost all your bio-degradable materials (vegetable peelings and fruit peelings).
* Take your own bag when shopping& refuse unnecessary packaging. Make it clear that you don’t want polystyrene, extra plastic or clingwrap – these are made from non-renewable oil.
* Think twice before you buy new clothes or appliances. Do you really need them, or do you just want them?
* Find out where and how to dispose of e-waste safely.
* Buy local goods and support proudly South African. Where possible, shop locally to reduce transport costs and keep money circulating in your community.
* Have regular 2nd hand sales at church to get rid of unused goods and to raise funds.
* Where possible, borrow and lend items you do not use often rather than buying them.
* When you go to the beach (or any outdoor recreation facility) bring home your own litter…and somebody else’s too!
* In your parish or small group; Download and watch “The Story of Stuff”.

**A Franciscan blessing**

May you be blessed with discomfort

at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships

so that you may live deep within your heart.

May you be blessed with anger

at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people

so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May you be blessed with tears

to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war

so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them

and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness

to believe that you can make a difference in the world

so that you can do what others claim cannot be done

to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.