

## Ten Action Steps for Individuals and Families Responding to the

### Current Global Environmental Crises

excerpted from research paper written by Mary Ann Holtz,  
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For an electronic copy of Mary Ann's complete paper, email your request to Mary Ann at [walt231@mindspring.com](mailto:walt231@mindspring.com)

For many years I have affirmed that all of creation is sacred, that everything comes forth from the One Creator, and that we humans are meant to live in a community of love with God and all of Nature. I have learned by study and experiences that we humans too often exist without awareness of our interconnection with God and the universe, and that we therefore often choose ways of living which endanger the lives and health of ourselves, of other humans and of the very planet. However, since my prayer, study, and action have been focused primarily in the areas of war and violence, poverty and consumerism, addiction, relational wounds, trauma and depression, the environmental crises had been only at the edges of my awareness and work. I have been a justice and peace educator and activist since 1979 and a Christian psychotherapist in a Catholic parish since 1985. As a Haitian proverb says, "we all see from where we stand", so I write standing in the Catholic Christian spiritual tradition. I have also learned that God's Spirit is not limited to any one tradition, and that if you are rooted in a different tradition your viewpoint will enrich me.

In October 2006, at the request of a therapist colleague, I read ***The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century*** by James Howard Kunstler. It seems that the Spirit used that reading to launch me into hours and hours of reading, reflecting, praying and writing about these environmental crises. (After reading this book I began searching for materials which would prove to me that Kunstler was just a misguided doomsday writer! Instead I believe that I have been given many resources to bring into my prayer and discernment and now to share.)

In these 18 months of prayerful research I have studied 18 books and numerous web-sites, and participated in the Center for Action and Contemplation's Great Chain of Being Conference (August 2007) at which Sr. Paula Gonzalez, SC was a keynote speaker.

I have become convinced that we are living in a *kairos* time. In Greek *kairos* is the word used for time to designate critical times, decision points, and in the New Testament to indicate special times of God's action in human history. ***The choices we make in the next decade or two, especially here in the U.S., will mean the difference between a livable future for our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews or one full of tragedies. Our choices already are affecting our impoverished sisters and brothers all over the planet and their sufferings will only increase horribly unless we allow God's Spirit to transform our hearts and our life choices.***

My prayer is that each of us will open to receive the Light which God shines for us, so that we may see clearly the part we have to play in this special time in history, and that we may receive the courage we need to act. It is likely that each one participating in this conference is already engaged in work which is valuable, whether that work is in healing bodies, souls and/or relationships, nurturing families, easing poverty and other suffering, bringing non-violent

respect for life to violent situations, etc. I have come to believe that, while we certainly can't drop those endeavors, we must allow a growing awareness of these environmental crises to deeply influence how we do all our other work. **It is all connected. We are all connected.**

I see three courses of action from which each of us can choose at this moment in human history: denial, despair, or the path of transformative action, inspired by the Spirit of God, of Love. Therefore, as you read or listen to this material, if you begin to sense yourself shutting down due to fear, gently turn to the Source of Love, breathe out the fear and breathe in Love. Let all that we do be motivated by Love: from God, for God, for ourselves, for our families and friends, for those suffering in poverty, and for the Earth itself.

### **Action Steps**

**None of us will be able to take all of these steps all at once. As part of our daily spiritual practice we can seek guidance for what actions we are to take, One Day At a Time, slowly building in as many of these steps as we are empowered for.**

**1) Daily prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading and study:** whatever spiritual practices help you to be rooted in Divine Love, in connection, in compassion and in hope, and help you open to Divine guidance. Here are some sites and resources I find helpful:

- a) Centering Prayer: method of prayer which helps form us in contemplative prayer and living  
<http://www.centeringprayer.com/>
- b) Center for Action and Contemplation: articles, CDs, books  
<http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/index.html>
- c) Sacred Space: daily on-line prayer guide using Judeo-Christian Scripture readings: <http://www.sacredspace.ie/>
- d) A Network for Grateful Living: a web-site with many ideas for spiritual practices to root us in gratefulness  
<http://www.gratefulness.org/>

***List the spiritual practice which helps to root you in God's Love and/or which of the resources above you will explore in the coming week:***

**2) Get outdoors** and open up to God's revelation of love through all of creation. Experience our physical connection to the Earth.

- a) individuals: Walk, garden, sit and breathe. ***List your favorites:***

b) couples/families: Our families are increasingly being pulled into isolated cells by technologies such as video games, cell phones, PCs and Ipods. We are living in terribly fast-paced ways, flooded often with stress chemicals. This lifestyle sets us up for more irritability, unresolved conflict, loss of connection with each other and the Earth. Make time with your spouse and with other family members to take walks or ride bikes, to go on picnics at the park or beach, to go to nature preserves for guided hikes, etc. A wise woman once taught me that all creatures, except humans, just by their very being praise their Creator; and when we go outdoors with the trees, plants, birds, animals, we are drawn into praise and peace.

***List one family outdoor activity you will enjoy within the next couple of weeks:***

**3) Consume less (Reduce) and Share more:** Our economy, based as it is on unbridled growth and production, is driving us to destroy the very earth upon which we are dependent for survival. Our "conspicuous consumption" and accumulation of stuff leads us to live over-worked, over-stressed, unhealthy lifestyles. Directly linked to our excesses is the devastating poverty and hunger of half of the people on our earth. (1 billion living on less than \$1 a day, another 2 billion living on less than \$2 dollars a day!!!).

**A) Consume Less:**

1) a) individuals : Use the handy tips for beating "Affluenza":

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/treat/tips.html> . ***List one time you are planning to purchase soon:***

***Answer the questions from Affluenza Tip #1:***

b) families: For one of your family nights, gather around the computer and watch and discuss: "The Story of Stuff with Annie Leonard" is an engaging new short film that explains the "materials economy" in 20 fun-filled minutes.

<http://www.storyofstuff.com:80/index.html>

***List other ways to involve your family in learning to consume less:***

2) When you do decide to make a purchase, look for Fair Trade and green products.

a) <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages/> : "**The National Green Pages™** is a directory listing nearly 3,000 businesses that have made firm commitments to sustainable, socially just principles, including the support of sweatshop-free labor, organic farms, fair trade, and cruelty-free products." See below for other Co-op America resources.

b) <http://www.crsfairtrade.org/> Catholic Relief Services Fair Trade program (chocolate, tea, coffee, gifts, trade fund). Also, for gift giving, consider **an alternative** gift from <https://www.alternativegifts.org/> : “A nontraditional way of giving. Rather than buying yet one more necktie for Uncle George, honor him instead by giving in his name a life-sustaining gift to help abolish global poverty or to renew our planet’s environment.”

***What gift are you planning to buy soon? Make a note of which of those two resources you will use to shop for this gift:***

**B) Share more:** If you don't already have groups whose work you believe in and with whom you regularly share, check out Charity Navigator. Don't let that old excuse "but how do we know the money is used wisely?" stop you from sharing your excess with those who don't have enough to feed their kids today!!! <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm> My favorite group is [www.BeyondBorders.net](http://www.BeyondBorders.net), with whom Walt and I and others from our parish visited in Haiti in 1999. Their new adult literacy curriculum includes two new modules --one focused on sustainable agriculture and environmental protection and the other focused on children's rights and parenting. Check them out via Charity Navigator site and notice they received the highest rating possible.

**4) Recycle and Reuse:** (remember “There is no **away**, when we throw away.”)

a) Recycling: Pinellas county A to Z guide: <http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/getridofit/> and <http://pinellascounty.org/utilities/kids/> (Lots of great resources to involve kids in caring for creation.) If you live outside Pinellas county, check with your local government.

b) Reuse: ask your grandparents for ideas. Also, see <http://www.freecycle.org/> which is on-line group through which you, your business or group can give away your excess goods to others who can use them and/or you can make a request for wanted items.

***List items which you already reuse or recycle .***

***What items did you see your elder family members reusing which you now throw away?***

***What do you regularly throw in the trash which you will now look for ways to recycle/reuse?***

## 5) Transportation:

a) Drive/fly less; walk/bike/bus and carpool when possible. Plan errands so that you drive the fewest miles possible. When driving around town, turn off the AC and roll down the windows; however, when driving highway speeds it is actually more fuel-saving to close windows and use AC. Give up pleasure rides, take pleasure walks instead! Have regular maintenance done (e.g. air filter checks, tire pressure optimal, etc.) so that your vehicle burns the least fossil-fuels possible.

When you are choosing a replacement vehicle, purchase a hybrid (in a few years plug-in electrics may be available) or an extremely gas efficient car. If you have a SUV, look into the possibility of having it converted into biodiesel!

b) Purchase carbon offsets for your fossil fuel emissions generated by travel and other energy usage. The option Walt and I use is *NativeEnergy*.

<http://www.nativeenergy.com/welcome.html>. "With *NativeEnergy*, you can help finance and build new clean and renewable energy projects that help Native Americans and Alaska Natives create sustainable economic benefits, and that help America's family farmers compete with agribusiness. These projects will displace electricity from fossil fuels and reduce other greenhouse gas emissions on your behalf, making up for the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions you can't avoid."

***List one item in this area which you can do now and one you will consider for the future:***

## 6) Food choices:

a) One area for action which recurs in nearly every resource I have studied involves the impact of our food choices. **The first recommended action here is to step-by-step move toward a plant-based diet, away from animal products.**

The **Vegetarian Resource Group** (<http://www.vrg.org>) offers lots of **guidance from Registered Dieticians** and some **great recipes** and easy ways to begin to switch your diet away from animal products. For a scientific research article about the connection between diet choices and climate change: <http://www.vrg.org/links/#EnviroInfo> ).

**For a guide to sustainable food choices**, see the Spring 2008 Co-op America Quarterly *Good Food: the Joy, Health, and Security of It*. For a quick overview **read the 3 page article** "Eat Less Meat and Cool the Planet" . Both resources can be found at Co-Op America web-site: <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/caq/articles/Spring2008/HealYourHome.cfm> which includes a wealth of information in addition to the info on food.

**For a connection between world hunger, Western overall consumption, and global warming:** [http://www.truthout.org/issues\\_06/070207EC.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/issues_06/070207EC.shtml) "Western Consumption May Cause Famines". Sunday 01 July 2007.

b) Another recurring recommendation in many of the sources I have been studying is to buy organic whenever possible, looking for **locally grown organic foods** where available.

One source for locally grown organic foods is Community-supported Agriculture (in Tampa Bay area: Sweetwater Organic Community Farm <http://www.sweetwater-organic.org/> or to search for one in your area: <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>).

**List one of your favorite meatless meals:**

**What is one food item which you buy weekly and you will now aim to buy locally/organically grown?**

**Circle which of the food articles above which you will read in next week.**

**7) Household and work-place energy use: As we run through 7& 8 lists circle those which you are willing to pursue over the next several months:**

a) check with your electricity provider for energy efficiency action steps. For Progress Energy: <http://www.progress-energy.com/custservice/flares/efficiency/index.asp> One of the tools on that web-site is an appliance usage calculator.

b) for an easy-to-refer-to list of small things we can all do, along with their impact on emissions: [http://www.stopglobalwarming.org/sgw\\_takeaction.asp](http://www.stopglobalwarming.org/sgw_takeaction.asp) For more comprehensive guides see Co-op America information below.

c) choose clothing which will keep you cool in summer, warm in winter. Limit as much as possible the use of air conditioning and heating.

d) change all light bulbs to compact fluorescent; over the long-range they save money as well as energy/emissions. Save the old incandescent bulbs for use in little-used locations like closets.

e) unplug electronics when you are not using them; one easy way is to hook up all computer-related items to one power strip, then turn off the power strip when you are not using the computer. And hook up all entertainment items to one power strip, turn it off when not using any of those items. Even when electronic devices are turned off, they use energy because of their "instantly-ready" systems. Perhaps we can even cut *way back* on use of these devices, especially TV, and make careful decisions about when to purchase and use other electronics.

f) line dry your clothes and air dry your dishes whenever possible. Clothes dryers and dishwashers take lots of fossil fuel energy (one load of either takes about 7 times the energy of one full load of cold water laundry wash, per Progress Energy calculator!)

g) choose the smallest, most efficient refrigerator you can find and keep the fridge and freezer sections full (it actually takes less energy to keep it cold if it is full). Donate any refrigerators which are used only for parties, retreats, special events.

h) when you are ready for a bigger step, research solar energy options.

## 8) Energy and Water-saving steps and products:

a) choose native plants (green lawns are not native to Florida), use rain barrels, stop using water and energy resources on sprinkler systems, stop using toxic pesticides and fossil-fuel based fertilizers, reduce areas which need mowing, stop using fossil-fuel guzzling edgers and leaf blowers!!

b) take very short showers, and use a low-flow showerhead to save on water heating. Install a low-volume toilet to save lots of water; this saves energy used in water pumping and sewer treatment systems, as well as saving the increasingly scarce resource of water! Also, when flushing: *"If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown flush it down."*

c) For vegetable-based cleaning products (did you know that most laundry and dish detergents are fossil-fuel based?????) which save fossil-fuels and are non-toxic or less toxic than the usual brands: <http://www.gaiam.com/retail/HomeOutdoor> Gaiam is also a great source for toilet paper made with recycled paper, and other environmentally-friendly products. Some of their products are available under their Seventh Generation label at local Publix and health food stores.

## 9) Socially responsible investing:

If you have savings, especially savings for retirement which may be some years off, do you know what companies you are investing in? Have you looked at their impact on the environment? Are they polluting, using fossil-fuels like there is no end, investing in things like tobacco and weapons? Or are they investing in alternative fuel development, affordable housing, education, community, health care, and environmental protection?

We need to use our investments to influence corporations to make needed changes; otherwise it's likely our investments will disappear as the economy crashes (when the easily pumped oil and natural gas reserves are used up--which could be within the next 10-20 years according to a number of the sources I have read.).

<http://www.coopamerica.org/socialinvesting/> For lots of great info and how-to's.

## 10) Join with others:

a) **to take action to influence government and corporations to make the urgent changes needed.** Pick a few groups which seem to be compatible with your views, research them, and then choose one or two to join. Join the action-alert networks of those groups and make the calls, send the emails/letters, go to the gatherings they organize. Our personal changes are essential. Yet, without city, state, national and global changes we will not make an adequate impact.

Some options include:

**<http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/> "With other national Catholic partners, this Coalition seeks to contribute a distinctive and authentic Catholic voice to the public debate...and encouraging the Catholic community to become involved in practical and public policy remedies to address climate change."**

**[http://www.stopglobalwarming.org/sgw\\_takeaction.asp](http://www.stopglobalwarming.org/sgw_takeaction.asp)** (noted in #7b on Page 6)

<http://www.cleanenergy.org/inYourState/subpage.cfm?ID=24> Southern Alliance for Clean Energy's "Global Warming Pollution in Florida Fact Sheet" and ideas for advocacy with elected officials.

<http://www.coopamerica.org> : "Co-op America is a not-for-profit membership organization founded in 1982. Our mission is to **harness economic power**—the strength of consumers, investors, businesses, and the marketplace—to **create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society.**" I have been a member for some years, lots of support and ideas for our ongoing changes. Their programs include: Living Green, Green Energy, Fair Trade, Climate Action, Wood Wise, Boycotts, Sweatshops, Responsible Shopper, and Shop & Unshop.

<http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/caq/articles/Spring2008/HealYourHome.cfm>.

This resource includes a wealth of information called "The Heal Your Home Center".

***Write down which group(s) you will research with goal of finding one or two to join:***

**b) to create local communities of mutual support.** Many of these authors suggest that one of the blessings that we may be able to receive as a result of having to navigate perilous times is a renewal of our local communities. Family groups, faith communities (especially smaller circles within large congregations), neighborhoods, small towns, co-ops, community gardens; communities who work together to address our basic life-support needs (food, shelter, etc), and social and spiritual needs. It will become crystal clear that our individualistic, narcissistic, "me-first", consuming, frenetically busy culture actually works against our survival.

Look at your own circles of influence and invite your friends, family, faith community, work and social circles to study these concerns with you, and to begin to envision together how we all might live, work, pray and play together in ways which might help to create a viable future for the next generations.

***List names of those in your circles of influence. Then list the thing(s) you have learned at this workshop which you will share with those people in the coming week or two.***

**"God has not called us to be successful, but faithful." "Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."**

**Mother Teresa of Calcutta**

