



image by James Jordan

The Ecology Frontier

CLC members from around the world were invited, at the 2013 World Assembly in Lebanon, to join together to “go to the frontiers of our social realities, to discern and develop a plan to raise awareness of the four frontiers: poverty and globalization, ecology, family and youth”. The General Council of CLC Canada asked Ixthus CLC to form a working group to address the Ecology Frontier. In the last issue of the Update, Ixthus submitted an article on Soil Sustainability. The following article deals with our forests and was prepared by Ann McRae McIsaac and Helen McQuaid. It is accompanied by contemplation on the sacredness of forests.

Deforestation

As children growing up in rural PEI, we enjoyed the forests, woodlands and vegetation surrounding our homes. We spent many hours watching birds build nests, waiting for eggs to hatch, and seeing the birds fly away on their own. Ann's family property had a cranberry bog and wetlands where ducks would hatch and learn to swim. Her father planted trees on their property and provided the nutrients to help them grow. As he dug the hole for the tree, he would place a herring in it along with the soil, telling his children the fish would make the tree grow! Over the years, we have both experienced the artistry and wonder of ash splint basketry. Ann learned the craft from her Acadian and Mi'kmaq neighbors and still regularly travels to the woods looking for the perfect ash tree for her work. As a child, Helen grew to appreciate basket making from visiting a summer Mi'kmaq camp in the woods close to her home. These and other experiences have left us, both, with a great sense of peace and a deep love and respect for our forests.

Pope Francis reminds us that Earth is our common home and the climate is a common good belonging to all and meant for all. As we have noticed in recent years, there has been a disturbing warming of the climatic system resulting in severe disasters around the world such as floods, droughts, crop failures etc. These disasters affect or destroy not only the lives of many of our brothers and sisters but the habitats of our plant and wildlife as well. This climatic change is mainly due to human activity. Several scientific studies state that most global warming is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere and also to the deforestation of our land for human purposes.

Deforestation is clearing the earth's forests on a massive scale. According to the World Wildlife Organization, forests now cover only 31% of the land areas on the planet. A statistic from *Earth and Faith, A Book of Reflection for Action* states that the destruction of the earth's rainforests is occurring at the rate of 25-50 acres every single minute. It is said that at this rate, the world's rainforests could completely vanish in one hundred years. This destruction of our forests has many negative effects on the environment.

Forests contribute in a large way to regulating our global climate. Since trees breathe in carbon dioxide, they are vital in providing the clean air that we need to breathe. They soak up carbon dioxide that would otherwise be free in the atmosphere to contribute to pollution and ongoing changes in climate patterns. By absorbing the carbon dioxide, they also contribute to keeping the planet cooler. Deforestation results in 12-20% of the world's carbon emissions, almost equal to all the carbon dioxide from the global transport system.

Our forests also provide shelter, jobs and security to forest dependent communities. Natural forests, such as the rainforests, are valuable because they shelter biodiversity, house indigenous people and cultures, contribute to economic growth, protect water sources and provide recreation. 40% of these natural forests are threatened by logging, mining and large-scale development. Common methods used in deforestation are clear cutting and slashing / burning. The people are displaced and their very livelihoods are threatened. One such example would be the rainforests of Sarawak, Malaysia. 1600 square kilometers of forest have been destroyed and 30,000-50,000 people have been displaced to make room for the development of oil palm plantations and hydropower dams. The rainforests are also home to over half the world's species of plants and animals and over 1000 species are being driven to extinction every year. Not only are the known species of plants and animals being destroyed but also those that we do not yet know exist in those areas. The loss to our planet is unimaginable. We are told that half of all prescription medicines come from plants, and nearly half of all plant species are found in the rainforests. 70% of all plants with cancer fighting properties grow in the rainforest.

In our own country, Canada, there are examples of this forest destruction from one end to the other. According to *National Geographic*, Vancouver Island has lost 73% of its productive old growth forests to logging. If not for the activism of alert environmentalists, the pristine forests of Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia may have met the same fate. The forests throughout Ontario, New Brunswick, and even PEI have not been spared. Every day you either hear or see the results of this forest destruction.

In an article entitled "Forest Refuge", John McCarthy, a Canadian Jesuit priest and ecologist,

states, “We are currently living in probably the greatest period of human-caused deforestation on the planet”. Reflecting on this, we find that protecting and managing our forests are key actions in adapting to and mitigating climate change. In 2012, the United Nations Environmental Program declared March 21st the International Day of Forests. This was part of a global effort to publicize both the value and the plight of woodlands around the world.

Reforestation is one of the easiest and most necessary ways to combat climate change. However, reforestation takes time, as new growth is slow and the damage has been done. We have lost valuable species, which can never be replaced, have displaced people from their communities, have contributed to global warming, etc. Our attitude and awareness has to change so that we value all life and respect the forests for the part they play in God's plan for life on planet Earth. Oxford University geography professor Michael Williams states, “Unless forests are either regarded as 'sacred' in some way or another or bought or conserved, sustainability of the forest will continue to diminish”.

Climate action and change, along with Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, are signs of hope for planet Earth. The following poem by Frederick Kirschenmann seems to be written for CLC, a global community.

“While it is increasingly difficult to remain optimistic
about our fate it is important to remember
that hopefulness is different from optimism.
Optimism assumes that things will turn out alright,
which, ironically often leads to inaction.
Hopefulness is about doing the right thing even
when we are uncertain about the outcome.

And when we act together in hope, often an unanticipated
convergence of events take place which bring about
unimaginable change.

Joining together as a global community and doing the right thing even
though we cannot be sure of the outcome is our
only hope, and our children and grandchildren are
depending on us to do it.”

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## CONTEMPLATING GOD’S LOVE THROUGH THE SACREDNESS OF THE FOREST

### THE COSMIC PRESENCE

I begin to appreciate this Cosmic Presence mystery of the Divine One by recalling the opening of John's Gospel: "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were created in the Word and without whom nothing was created....*"

From this cosmic vantage point of the beyond, I spend time pondering how our caring God makes the decision to enter our tiny created world in time. I can use my power of imagination to comprehend how the Three Divine Persons are distressed at how human beings are destroying themselves and their planet home. I listen to them as they determine how the second person, who is Word and begotten within God's Trinitarian life, should become human to save us.

## **FIRST POINT**

So, I spend time seeing what they see, hearing what they hear, understanding what they understand: the variety of peoples throughout the world -- peoples of different races, colours, creeds, with differing gifts and limitations; some making peace and others making war; some weeping, others laughing; some well, others ill; some being born and others dying; some cooperating, others refusing to cooperate, etc.

I take time to appreciate how God watches part of the universe, Planet Earth, being destroyed and its people moving towards hell. Destruction is caused by competitive behaviours: by unchecked pollution and destruction of the earth's ecological systems, by displacement of indigenous peoples, by starving mothers not being able to feed their starving children, by people dying from diseases caused by environmental irresponsibility fuelled by the quest for profit and greed.

I taste and see the efforts of good people being thwarted and undermined by the mystery of evil at every turn.

What do the persons of the Trinity see on our planet?

What are they thinking and feeling about all this?

Listen to them expressing their concern?

Stand in awe as you contemplate their decision to send the second person to become human for us.

## **SECOND POINT**

While I contemplate this mystery as it takes place in time and place, I ask for the grace of a deep-felt knowledge of God become human in Jesus for me so that I might love him more and follow his Spirit more closely.

*This contemplative exercise can be done by taking a walk in a forested area where one can contemplate the beauty of the trees. If one cannot do this, you may want to place a potted plant of a tree or place a spruce branch on your prayer table.*

Reflect prayerfully on the following words from

1 Chronicles 16: 31 -34

*Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice, say among the nations, "Yahweh is King".*

*Let the sea thunder and all that it holds, let the fields exult and all that is in them.*

*Let all the trees shout out with joy, and rejoice before Yahweh, for He comes to rule the earth.*

*Give thanks to Yahweh, for God is good, God's love endures forever.*

As you grow still and quiet, you become conscious of your relationship with the trees. Recall the words from 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles... *"Let all the trees shout out with joy, and rejoice before Yahweh, for He comes to rule the earth".*

By using your powers of imagination you

Listen to what the tree is saying to you.

Listen to the wind blowing through the branches of the trees and what is the wind saying to you.

Become part of the mystery of the trees graced history and become one with the tree with your own history.

Allow yourself to interact with the tree: enter into conversation with the tree, reflecting on the words of Nikos Kazantzakis, *"I said to the almond tree, "Friend, speak to me of God. And the almond tree blossomed."*

Allow the event to unfold through your imagination. Be as passive as possible allowing this to take place.

## **DIALOGUE**

As you end your contemplation, enter in a dialogue with the Divine Creator as you consider how God toils and protects you through the tree and all created things on this planet.

End your conversation by committing to work with the Trinity for the coming of a new creation where Christ is all in all.

One could end the contemplation by praying the Lord's Prayer.