

May 2019

✦ Generations of Faith ✦

FAITH NOTES

✦ Enriching, Educating, Engaging All Ages ✦



Transforming Values into Action: Meet the Mobilizers Behind St. Matthew's Care for Creation Ministry

About a year ago, St. Matthew's parishioners Meg and Rob Breen launched a new ministry: Caring for Creation. "Care for Creation" is a core principle of Catholic Social Teaching as well as the focus of May Generations of Faith, and since Meg and Rob are serving as guest facilitators of May's GOF weekend, it seemed perfect timing to sit down with the mobilizers behind St. Matthew's newest ministry to learn about what led them to this sacred calling...

When would you say your passion for caring for creation first took root?

Rob: When I was very young, my family lived in a small cottage in the woods, and as a kid I rode my bike everywhere exploring my world, especially the creeks, woods, fields and lakes around here. Right out of college, I got my first job supervising a youth conservation corps, and I have been involved in environmental conservation work ever since.

Meg: I grew up with a wooded area and wetland behind my house that as neighbors we all shared and none of us 'owned'. This land was a wonderful natural playground for us and really formed my love of the earth. There was rarely a day of the year that I wasn't out there playing, creating, exploring and imagining. When I was about 12, area developers were surveying the land to tear down and level the land and build houses. My mother and a group of neighbors – adults and kids - organized together and met with local land trusts and after a long battle, and plenty of community mobilizing and meetings with lawyers and holding news interviews, we were able to have the land turned over to a trust that ensured it would stay forever green. We named the land 'Friendship Woods'. That experience cemented not only my love for the earth but the realization that I could not take it for granted.

How deeply entwined with your Catholic faith is that passion, and why?

Rob: My Catholic faith is the very core and foundation of everything I do in my care for creation work. Our Church has incredible eco-spirituality roots from our Celtic and Franciscan traditions, and through these traditions I was able to truly encounter the Divine in nature.

Meg: It's a funny thing, it never felt separate, and so I would say my passion for caring for the earth and my faith are very deeply entwined. While the church of my youth wasn't loudly discussing environmental issues, or perhaps not discussing them at all, I did clearly receive the message that God is love and we are called to love and serve others and to see Christ in them. I took that implicitly to mean that creation was included in that too. So for me, being in the woods and playing in a stream and observing insects was also a sacred experience. Even as a kid, I felt the presence of God in nature.

If there was a single, first step that each person could take to improve the environmental future of our shared planet, what would it be?

Plant a garden! By doing this, we begin to restore right relationship between humans and the earth.

Why should people read Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si'?

It is a message to all people of goodwill to learn to care for our common home- after all we are all on this one planet together. It is written in plain language and not theological language and it has the essential messages needed to help humans thrive on the planet earth into the future.



Favorite Laudato Si' quote?

Meg: "We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

Rob: "Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity."

What led you to form the St. Matthew's Care for Creation Ministry (C4C)? Can you give a quick summary of what this ministry entails, why you believe it is an important addition to the ministries of St. Matthews, and how parishioners can get involved?

For starters, we have a desire to be more involved in the St. Matthew's parish community. Also, we recognize that the Catholic Church is late in the game in both raising awareness and working to address the issues impacting our planet and we feel a sense of responsibility to be a part of that work. This ministry is rooted in Scripture and *Laudato Si'* and we want to mobilize our Catholic community to do our share to help protect and restore creation and to prepare for the unfolding effects of climate change. St. Francis, St. Clare and St. Bonaventure remind us that our first encounter with God may often be a sacred encounter with God's creation. This ministry would seek to foster that engaging families and youth to encounter God through nature and to work together to care for our common home. Parishioners can get involved in three ways – we have a leadership team for studying the Pope's encyclical and creating a vision for this ministry; second is leading and organizing actual projects and events; and third is to volunteer for those projects and events.

Three interesting tidbits about the Breen family?

1. We homeschool on a sustainable homestead raising goats, ducks, chickens, bees and growing mushrooms, vegetables and medicinal herbs.
2. Three of our five kids were born at our home.
3. We are all huge Harry Potter fans and we name all of our goats after characters from the story. In fact, just today, Hermione and Tonks were born!

"We end where we began, with respect for life – but this time we are talking not only about human life but all life on Earth as well as Earth itself. God has entrusted this planet to our care. As we are becoming increasingly aware, all life is impacted by the choices we make as individuals, organizations and nations. Proper use of the Earth's natural resources will allow us to preserve and pass on to future generations the beautiful, nurturing world as our Creator intended." –7 Main Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, Christian Foundation for Children and Aging

"Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan; it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored." –***Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops***

Planting Seeds and Digging Deeper

(From Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching)

➤ **For Catholics:**

- How are we called to care for God's creation?
- How may we apply our social teaching with its emphasis on the life and dignity of the human person, to the challenge of protecting the earth, our common home?
- What can we in the Catholic community offer to the environmental movement, and what can we learn from it?
- How can we encourage a serious dialogue in the Catholic community – in our parishes, schools, colleges, universities and other settings – on the significant ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis?

➤ **For People of Good Will Across the Country:**

- How do we proceed from a common and workable environmental ethic?
- What steps can we take to devise a sustainable and just economy?
- What can we do to more firmly link in the public mind both the commitment to justice and duties to the environment?
- How can we recognize and confront the possible conflicts between environment and jobs, and work for the common good and solutions that value both people and the earth?
- How do we secure protection for all God's creatures, including those who live in poverty and the unborn?
- How can the United States, as a nation, act responsibly about this ever more global problem?
- How in working for a sustainable global economy, do we fulfill our obligations in justice to those who are poor in developing nations?

All across our country, Catholics are taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and joining the Catholic Climate Covenant. The St. Francis Pledge is a promise and a commitment by Catholic individuals, families, parishes, organizations and institutions to live our faith by protecting God's Creation and advocating on behalf of people in poverty who face the harshest impacts of global climate change. To join the Covenant, you commit to act on each of the five elements of the St. Francis Pledge.

THE SAINT FRANCIS PLEDGE

I/We Pledge to:

PRAY and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.

LEARN about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.

ASSESS how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc. **ACT** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.

ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

To learn more, and take the pledge, visit:

<https://catholicclimatecovenant.org>

