

ARE WE ADVOCATES FOR EARTH'S FUTURE?

Yes, You Can Buy Ladybugs! On Saturday, the 19th October 2019 this response evoked laughter in a Limerick cosmology gathering! Fascinating though Ladybugs or Lady-beetles are, why and how would anyone buy or sell them? Perhaps we are not all aware that Ladybugs are the sworn enemy of greenfly and aphids and therefore a valuable asset to even the amateur gardener! And yes, Lady-bugs can be bought at some more entrepreneurial and ecologically minded garden Centres!

The hall-full of laughing people who had gathered on Saturday morning at Don Bosco Centre, Milford, were more than a little serious about our planet's future and they were very interested in insects and in promoting biodiversity without the introduction of harmful chemicals. All present at the conference were genuinely concerned about 'climate change' and the welfare of our planet. They were gathered to hear what they might do about "*a Limerick Response to Climate Change*". Regardless of age or state of health, each person present possessed the capability of contributing to a response to earth's cry for 'help'! Each was ready to embrace the responsibility of responding in some way. Even small changes in our lifestyles can make a difference.

We don't have to be philosophers or scientists to notice the **signs of our times**. Our information sources and communication apps bring us an abundance of unwelcome news clips about melting ice-caps, rising sea levels, swamping coastlines, disappearing islands, changing weather conditions and even more local threats to our herds and potato crops. We know we add to that situation through the devastating effects of human activities, e.g., obliteration of rainforest areas, pollution of ocean and water systems, abuse of the land and destruction of natural habitats; and that's just a few! These behaviours contribute to the loss of biodiversity, diminishment of top-soil and destruction of the very systems: air, sun and water that support our very survival.

Ah, you say, this destruction is happening in the big world where we have little influence! I may be overwhelmed with the enormity of the problem but what can one person do?

The truth is every one of us can make a difference! All is not gloom and doom! In the midst of all the negatives about destructive forces it is encouraging to see some signs of hope. None of us is alone.

Have courage! Developing across the world is a kind of groundswell of people from all walks of life, pointing out the factors that are contributing to the destruction of earth, as well as highlighting ways human beings can respond. Scientists and others are publishing the results of their research. We hear about "Earth Overshoot Day" - marking the date when earth's population uses more of the planet's resources than the planet is able to replace. Churches celebrating the "Season of Creation," (from 1st September to 4th October each year), remind us to respect God's gift of creation and to care for it. A slogan such as "CUSP" challenges us to "cease using single use plastic"!

Cosmology groups, too, are evolving and becoming more vocal. We can rejoice in the ministry of many Religious Orders who, with a growing number of lay-people, are spending significant energy in developing sensitivity to the environment! Over the last ten years the Salesian Cosmology Group in Limerick has been running conferences to raise people's consciousness levels about the crisis facing our planet, earth. They have encouraged all who attend to make lifestyle adjustments that are more respectful of earth's resources and to be mindful that future generations have the right to a healthy planet.

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'Skeptics' and 'believers' range across the spectrum of those who read the signs of the times as saying: 'opportunity is no where' to those who see: 'opportunity is now here!' The latter group is increasing so don't feel alone. However, convincing millions of human beings about the destruction caused by our present

lifestyles is an enormous challenge. Persuading them to change habits of a lifetime is even a more mammoth undertaking. But changing our destructive habits is literally a matter of life or death for earth, our common home!

Throughout Saturday's Limerick conference, Sister Nellie McLoughlin RSM instructed, enlightened and enthused her listeners. "Active Hope is necessary!" Sr Nellie said. We must have hope in the midst of our current environmental crisis. We must be active in addressing the crisis. She challenged her listeners to:

- i) Take a clear view of reality;
- ii) Identify what we hope for and
- iii) Move ourselves in that direction!

Pope Francis is certainly someone who 'takes a clear view of reality'; identifies what he hopes for' and moves in that direction'!

He champions "Active Hope"! Our Pope doesn't miss an opportunity to draw attention to the cry of the poor and the cry of earth; two cries that are interdependent in most poverty stricken parts of the world.

In Pope Francis's visit to Madagascar in September, this year, he encouraged President Andry Rajoelina and the country's government to provide jobs for the people so that they are not forced to cut down trees to find suitable land for crops or poach and hunt to extermination the country's fauna. The Pope challenged the country's leadership to address the issue of excessive and illegal logging and exploitation of the country's precious mineral resources as well as its unique plant and animal species. The Pope pointed out:

The deterioration of that biodiversity compromises the future of the country and of the earth, our common home.

In 2015 Pope Francis wrote his inspiring encyclical, Laudato Si. In it he spoke about society in the context of caring for creation:

Our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Earth is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. Yet it is the place we call our home, the only home we have in the universe, so we must save it.

In October, 2019, Pope Francis is presiding over a Synod of Bishops from the Amazon Region. The Synod is focussing on teaching the message of Jesus in the context of the Amazon. The Pope has referred to the Amazon Synod as the "son" of Laudato Si. He said he was centring on the Amazon Region, not only because of the poverty and exploitation of its people but because of the Region's "decisive contribution to the survival of the planet" through its production of oxygen and biodiverse vegetable and animal life. He said that only those who had read Laudato Si would understand the Amazon Synod. Pope Francis is a powerful advocate for care of creation but there are many more resounding voices at home and abroad.

Last month, Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, appeared on our television screens as she berated the United Nations and world leaders on their failure to act in the interest of protecting our planet for future generations. Her climate action sparked off strikes and protests by thousands of school and university students across a dozen or more nations. As was expected many objected to change for justifiable reasons and more, with vested interests, saw the actions of the younger generations as irresponsible and inappropriate. Regardless of Greta's critics the destruction of our environment is an imminent reality unless action is taken now to protect our planet's future.

The people of West Limerick are no less aware of future climatic hazards than are their international neighbours. Already we are 'reducing; reusing; and recycling'! We are composting and collecting rain water. Already flower baskets adorn our bridge and we are intentionally planting to promote the welfare of insects and biodiversity in our gardens. Mahoonagh School has been awarded the "Green Flag" for the 'umpteenth

time.’ Every Good Friday crowds take to our roads to clear our countryside of litter. We have become ‘eco’ conscious about white goods in our kitchens; we have insulated our homes; we are aware of our need to wean from use of fossil fuels and we have re-placed many of our diesel cars with hybrids. The list could go on. There is still room for us to increase our efforts in most of the areas listed above.

Into the future perhaps, our parishes could seek the “Green Certificate”. We could drive a little more slowly when possible and so reduce fuel consumption. We could avoid or reduce the use of harmful chemicals in our homes, gardens, at work or recreation. We could promote awareness of biodiversity and spend more quality time in nature. We could choose more “Fair Trade” goods in our shopping. We could explore the possibilities of alternative energy such as solar panels. We could turn off TVs rather than leave them on standby.

Our Councilors could promote, among other things, more attention to the quality of local waters; more village street care and more wild flowers growing at roundabouts and on verges. More people could join their voices in lobbying and protesting against a whole host of destructive practices such as the horror of human trafficking; fracking for gas, tyre-burning at our cement factory and illegal dumping. Much is done and much is still to do!

How will we answer future generations when they ask:
What did you do when you knew planet earth was in crisis?

Will you be able to say:
I became an advocate for our planet’s future.

Let us pray:

God of Creation, grant us the wisdom to care for the earth, to till it and to act now for the good of future generations and the entire community of life. Grant us the courage to reduce air pollution in our everyday living. Help us be mindful of all who are directly impacted by the effects of Climate Change. God of Creation guide us to Peace & Justice. Amen

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