

Social Affairs Committee
Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops

May 1st, 2011 – Proudly Reconciling Work and the Environment

Dear workers and colleagues,

On May 1st, 2011, the members of the Social Affairs Committee of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops are pleased to wish you a *Happy Workers' Day!*

A French writer once shared an interesting story. He came upon several laborers who were breaking rocks and complaining. *“Is there any job more exhausting and degrading than this?”* Farther away, another group busy with the same task proudly stated, *“You know, these stones will be used in the construction of the new cathedral.”* This anecdote clearly illustrates how we feel about our work can completely change our perspective.

We believe that this May 1st observance can provide several *teachable moments* as we reflect on what our work means to us. Our jobs enable us to earn our living and for many, to ensure the well-being and security of our families. Yet we also discover that our work becomes more meaningful if we are aware of its effect on effect on the environment.

What footprint will we leave behind?

We begin these reflections with our concern for creation since we are increasingly conscious of our interaction with the environment. Through our leisure activities or employment, with our daily commute or residences, we leave evidence of our passage. We are all responsible for these footprints, whether or not we acknowledge it.

Of course, the challenges involved in restoring and protecting our environment need a collective response. It is essential that countries respect and enforce their signed international agreements. Our government representatives must be acutely aware that they have their constituents' unconditional support on these issues. Isn't it true that we, citizens, must insist that our elected officials be accountable and carry out their responsibilities?

Moving forward

Happily, some experts claim that many municipalities, organizations and businesses have implemented certain objectives listed in major international agreements. We wish to express our appreciation and acknowledgement to these courageous and creative entities that have changed their operating methods and now function with an acute awareness of their impact on the environment. If you work for organizations that have accepted these challenges, we can assume that you are very proud of them and rightly so. While sharing another's pride is a step in the right direction, being inspired by their success and examples to take on similar, personal endeavors is even better! While their achievements inspire and encourage us, they may equally motivate others to channel their skills and creative efforts so that they too can feel greater pride in their work.

The media regularly present programs that feature meritorious individuals and companies that have implemented environmental practices. Here are some examples:

- A local forestry management group announced that in the Chaudière-Appalachian region, more than 82% of the public forest under stewardship (115,162 hectares) will be developed in conformity with the norms of sustainable forestry stewardship FSC (Forest Stewardship Council).¹
- Following consultations by the *Conférence régionale des élus*, many businesses in the Gaspé region have adopted policies that ensure the development of sustainable tourism.²
- Many agricultural farms have converted to biological production methods. Others have renovated their buildings so that their animals can move around and have more contact with nature.
- Cities like Montreal increasingly promote public transport which reduces green house gases: commuter trains, carpooling, *BIXI* bike services, co-op car services, etc.
- In many businesses, employees who work at check-out counters offer reusable bags to customers. Other places have adopted the **Development and Peace** proposal to create *Bottled Water Free Zones*. Reusable and recycling campaigns continue to support many programs.
- In 1978, only 2% of the population of Québec had access to a network of sewer systems connected to a purification station. Today the figure is more than 98%.³
- As far as people and environments are respected, wind farms contribute supplementary green and reusable energy to our current hydroelectric system.
- Through its *Green Church* program, the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism supports Christian communities that have adopted better environmental practices in their focus on Christian spirituality that respects creation.

¹ "Gestion Forap obtient la certification FSC", *Le Placoteux*, November 3, 2010, p. 14.

² Internet site of the *Conférence régionale des élu(e)s et des Îles-de-la Madeleine*: <http://www.cre-gim.net>.

³ Jacques Prescott, *L'eau, richesse collective à préserver*, *Prêtre et pasteur*, Vol 105 No. 6, (June 2002), pp. 348-354.

Leading by Example

We can cite hundreds of similar cases. However these suffice to illustrate situations where, as workers, you participate in common goals that support sustainable development and ensure environmental quality. Perhaps you may think your contribution won't make any difference when compared to the challenges we face, but let's remember the words of the poet, Jacques Michel: *Tiny drops of water feed large streams.* (free translation)⁴

When your work has this focus, dear colleagues, you respect the Creator's plan. He *brought creation out of chaos into cosmos, that is, from a universe marked by disorder to one where order and beauty reign.*⁵ He rejoiced and after each step, *God saw that it was good* (Gen 1:9).

Like our Creator, we feel joy and pride as we examine the results of our own work that aims for a harmonious relationship with nature. We are becoming more acutely aware of environmental issues. Whenever we examine photos of the earth from space, don't we feel that, for better or for worse, we are all traveling together on the same spatial journey?

In conclusion we acknowledge that the Author of Life gave the first human beings stewardship of our terrestrial paradise: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it* (Gen 2:15). This is **the** statement on environmental protection and sustainable development. Through our faith, Jesus Christ clarifies our relationship with the universe so that we see it as he did, with eyes of love – a love that was so inclusive that he gave up his life. Then isn't it a natural progression to correlate Christ's law of love with ecology?⁶

We believe that respecting God's plan for creation brings *added value* to the meaning of our existence.

There is still much to do, but on this May 1st, may you feel proud of your progress in reconciling work with the environment.

Social Affaires Committee

† Pierre-André Fournier, † Roger Ébacher, † Jean Gagnon; † Paul Lortie; Bernadette Dubuc, Éliisa Fernandez, SFA, Fr. Michel Forget, Denise Martel and Louise Royer.

Translation : Mrs. Honore Kerwin-Borrelli. [KK]

⁴ Jacques Michel, *Amène-toi chez nous.*

⁵ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission for Social Affairs, *Our Relationship to the Environment, The Need for Conversion*, March 2008.

⁶ See the pastoral letter on the Christian ecological imperative from CCCB's Commission for Social Affairs entitled, "You Love All That Exists... All Things Are Yours, God, Lover of Life..." October 4, 2003.