

Our Environment, Our Responsibility

The Catholic Review

Finally, at last the flow of oil—estimated at between 94 and 184 million gallons over three months—seems to be under some control in the Gulf of Mexico.

We continue to watch with horror the devastation on the Gulf Region's ecological system. If nothing else comes from this natural disaster, we should be awakened to our responsibility to preserve the natural resources created by God and given to us to safeguard and maintain for future generations.

This is especially true for us Catholics, for our faith teaches us that not only is all creation a gift that must be shared, but that proper stewardship of the environment is a direct response to our obligations toward one another, most especially the poor.

"The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction," Pope Benedict XVI said.

Protecting the environment can be as large a task as the one currently underway off the coast of Louisiana or as intimate as the efforts we make in our own day-to-day lives.

Nor are such initiatives reserved for people living closest to natural resources. In fact, here in Baltimore City, we see our people taking steps to respect and reverence our environment in different ways every day.

"Our community, our responsibility" is a slogan developed a few years ago by our friend in the Muslim community, Imam Earl El-Amin. It is intentionally vague because it can be applied to many of our day-to-day actions and it perfectly describes the efforts of many city neighborhoods to clean up their blocks. Instead of

having people from outside the city come in to perform a neighborhood cleanup as a goodwill gesture, neighbors in areas of our city are joining together to clean their own alleys and streets. They are taking responsibility for their properties and in doing so are sending a message of pride and respect toward their neighbors. They are also protecting water, air and land while improving their own quality of life.

In another area of town, near our East Baltimore parishes of St. Ann and St. Wenceslaus, neighbors reclaim a street corner absconded by drug dealers into an urban park. A different vision for preserving the environment, these residents created green space where there had previously been only bloodshed, the result of drugs and violence.

In another section of the city—outside our own Basilica—the Pope John Paul II Prayer Garden rises from the asphalt at Charles and Franklin Streets to welcome urban pedestrians to an oasis of prayer and a reminder of God's gift of nature.

There are many more examples occurring throughout our Archdiocese, I'm sure, and we will continue to do our part to preserve our environment for each other, our children and for future generations. By doing so, we show respect for our sisters and brothers and our gratitude to God the Creator.

This is the heart of the Covenant for Creation, a document recently signed by the Archdiocese and other area faith communities. It commits us to working toward the fulfillment of the "sacred, equitable and joyous partnership of God, humanity and all creation." As we view tragedies like the Gulf oil spill, may we be strengthened in our resolve to meet this goal, this responsibility.