

March 25th, 2024



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Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of San Angelo

Pastoral Statement for World Earth Day

Earth Day focuses attention on appreciation and stewardship for Planet Earth.

The 54th Earth Day anniversary will be celebrated on April 22nd, 2024, by millions of people in many countries to safeguard and fight for a brighter future for Planet Earth. World Earth Day always focuses attention on appreciation and stewardship for planet earth. In a particular way, EarthDay.ORG, the global organizer of Earth Day which grew out of the first Earth Day, has announced the global theme for Earth Day 2024; Planet Vs. Plastics.

The first Earth Day in 1970 mobilized millions of Americans from all walks of life to give birth to the modern environmental movement. On international Mother Earth Day, we reflect on humanity's important relationship, not only among human beings, but with the whole natural world. The UN Secretary General has reminded us that from the

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air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil that grows our food- humanity's health depends on the health of Mother Earth. He cautions us that sadly, many times, we seem hellbent on its destruction. Our actions are laying waste to forests, jungles, farmland, wetlands, oceans, coral reefs, rivers, seas, and lakes. Biodiversity is collapsing as one million species teeters on the brink of extinction. We must end these relentless and senseless wars on nature. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the solutions, but we must pick up the pace.

The annual celebration of Earth Day indeed calls us to pick up the pace of not only caring for our fellow human beings, but we must also care for the entire Earth and all creation. Our Creator gave us stewardship over the Earth, not to dominate it but to care, protect, and enrich it. As Pope Francis has said many times, Earth is our Common Home, the only home we have, the only one we will pass on to the next generations. This World Day leads us to

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have a new appreciation and respect for the beauty and goodness of the natural world that surrounds us, nothing more and nothing less, than God's work of art, his own beautiful gallery. Through the beauty, variety, harmony, and truly wonder-filled marvels of creation, our Creator has something very important to say to us. Today all humanity should lift up prayers of thanksgiving to our loving God for the wonderful gift of Mother Earth, which provides us with the means we need to stay alive. And then, humbly pray that we will be better stewards to better care for this magnificent gift.

Care for the Earth

Humanity's unique role within nature is illustrated by the fact that the Earth has been given to us to cultivate, care for, protect, and preserve. Our responsibility for God's Earth means we must respect natural laws with the delicate equilibria, the biodiversity, existing between all creatures of this

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world. In this way, we come to see that nature has intrinsic value and that each creature possesses its own particular goodness. Again, the UN General reminds us of those healthy ecosystems- from Oceans and rivers to forests and prairies- that are also critical in our fight against climate change. So, let's get to work to implement the historic UN biodiversity agreement to ensure that the Earth's land and water are protected. This Earth Day, all people everywhere on the globe should raise their voices- in our Homes, schools, workplaces, cities, civic and faith communities, and on social media platforms- and demand leaders to make peace with nature. And, we must learn from the time-won wisdom, knowledge, and leadership of indigenous peoples, whose environmental stewardship stretches back millennia, and who hold many of the world's solutions to the world's climate and biodiversity crisis.

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Communities are called to work together.

“Planet Vs. Plastics”

Today, not only is Earth Day meant to increase awareness of environmental problems, but it is also becoming a popular time for many communities to gather together to pick up litter, plant trees, clean our sources of water, and how to reduce the pollution of the atmosphere beginning in our homes, our neighborhoods, and local communities, or simply reflect on the beauty of nature. While there might be several overlapping themes assigned to Earth Day, EarthDay.Org proposes Planet Vs. Plastics, as the global theme for Earth Day 2024. This theme is a call to unite students, parents, businesses, governments, church's, unions, individuals, and NGOs in an unwavering commitment to call for the end of plastics for the sake of human and planetary health, demanding a 60% reduction

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in the production of plastics by 2040 and an ultimate goal of building a plastic-free future for generations to come. EarthDay.Org promotes widespread public awareness of the damage done by plastic to humans, animals, and all biodiversity's health and demanding more research to be conducted. Org calls for the rapid phasing out of all single use plastics by 2030 with a commitment in the United Nations treaty on plastic pollution, and to invest in innovative technology and materials to build a plastic-free world. Kathleen Rogers, President of EarthDay.Org, reminds us that "The planet Vs. Plastics campaign is a call to arms, a demand that we act now to end the scourge of plastics and safeguard the health of every living being upon our planet." EarthDay.Org's mission is to diversify, educate, and activate environmental movements worldwide.

The wonderful gift of Water

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Earth Day in a particular way focuses on the wonderful gift of Water which makes up a huge part of Planet Earth. This day calls us to examine our appreciation for the life-giving gift of water, which is necessary for all life as we know it on Planet Earth. It is the occasion to review major water issues, and to renew action to tackle water and the sanitation crisis, and worldwide to provide clean and safe drinking water for the millions and millions of our fellow human beings who still lack it. World Earth Day is closely linked to World Water Day which was celebrated a month ago on March 22nd. There is a natural and essential connection between these two special ecological days.

Renewed appreciation for Mother Earth

World Earth Day is indeed an important time to focus our attention and appreciation on the

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wonderful God-given gift of Mother Earth and how we can be better stewards for our planet and the surrounding universe. The creation that surrounds us is indeed “a chalice of grace.” It is gracious because it reveals God’s abundant goodness. This grace, this goodness is found everywhere and to treat it with disrespect and abuse is blasphemy. The imprint of the Creator as the patron of the environment, Saint Francis teaches us, is found in all creation, especially in humans. The environment is sacred as it comes from the Holy Hands of our Creator and to ruthlessly destroy it is a sacrilege. This is why Pope Francis, in his many statements on environmental issues, emphasizes the moral imperative to care for our Common Home. Pope Francis states “it is necessary to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, striving to put an end to the senseless war on our Common Home, which is a terrible “World War.” In his latest documents, he emphasizes the

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interconnection of creation, Christian anthropology, the limits of new technologies, and subsidiarity. He stresses the concept of integral ecology, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the environment, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. He advocates for an integrated approach to addressing environmental challenges, recognizing that solutions to environmental problems must consider the well-being of both humanity and the entire planet.

A call to universal action

The Un Environmental program highlights the need to shift to a more sustainable economy that benefits both people and the planet. Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action as nature is suffering more and more. As the climate emergency intensifies, the transition to our climate's stability becomes increasingly critical. Progress will depend on how countries and their ability to cover ground

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on their commitments on recent international agreements and eventually their collective contribution to keep the global average temperature well below 2°C.

All nations should support the United Nations climate negotiations from Dubai for 50 oil companies around the world to fulfill the pledge to reach near zero methane emissions and end routine flaring in operations by 2030. The Dubai agreement would trim about one-tenth of a degree Celsius, nearly two-tenths of a degree Fahrenheit from future warming.

Earth Day reminds us that the engagement of the world must transcend politics, personal policy, agendas, and focus on human ecology which calls for a conversion of political, economic, cultural, and social systems as well as individual lifestyles, and sharing all of Earth's goods with all inhabitants. We are living in a time of crisis, fracturing the

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environment in countless ways including global climate change. We see damage in the nature that surrounds us, but we also see it in men and women. Science and technology have contributed much to progress and enrichment of the gifts of creation. However, there are moral limits of their use and application which sometimes have deleterious effects on the environment. The proper ecological balance depends on international cooperation, inter-generational solidarity and addressing the roots of poverty. Earth Day needs to promote a holistic ecology which is sustainable and integral. At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge, it calls us to examine how we live, use, and share the goods of the Earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with all of God's creation on our Common Home. Caring for our Common Home requires a need for a paradigm shift- to accompany and to accelerate the transition towards an ethical, social,

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and economic paradigm based on integral sustainability.