

We all have a role in protecting Earth

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People of good conscience recognize we have an obligation to preserve and protect our environment. This includes all parts of our planet, rocks, inorganic matter, energy, things living and natural resources. Even when we stretch our minds, we do not have the capacity to grasp all that exists. The universe is too complex for us to fully comprehend. Nonetheless, we can be conscious of the interconnectedness of our part of the universe, planet earth, upon which humans depend.

Since we are mainly interested in human aspects of the universe, ethical people think about our relationships to each other. We should also be concerned about connections with non-human aspects of the universe. A healthy environment becomes crucial as we increase world population and presently have technology to either destroy or to protect our natural resources.

The environment leaves many things to consider. These include energy sources, transportation, and climate change. In addition, knowledge about productive environments involves the thin layer of top soil, usually, less than six inches deep. World-wide, this layer of top soil is crucial to food production and covers only a small portion of the planet's surface. We are fortunate to have rich topsoil in much of South Western Ontario and in our Prairie Provinces.

We can protect our environment by learning to re-use and recycle some materials such as plastic containers which are now frequently disposed of as waste. Even more harmful to our environment are dangerous chemical contaminants which are not properly contained or safely stored. The safe containment of nuclear wastes still remains a gargantuan challenge as to how to dispose of such long lasting radioactive nuclear wastes.

While sharing food and distributing it to alleviate undernourishment in large parts of our planet is theoretically possible, our best efforts have fallen short. Advanced practices in agriculture can help to provide enough for everyone globally. As efforts to relieve undernourishment continue, problems of sharing and re-distributing food and resources are exacerbated by a population that now exceeds seven billion. Even using best agricultural methods and careful distribution, a growing world population may, at some point, surpass our improved agricultural technology and defeat our

best efforts to feed those who are undernourished.

Last, but not least, demands for energy presently expand rapidly. One case in point is our reliance on oil production, whether oil comes from resources under our oceans or is found in the tar sands of Alberta. While hydraulic fracturing or fracking has made oil more available, some environmental scientists associated with Food and Water Watch, Environment Protection Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Greenpeace, U.S.A. and Environment America Research and Policy Centre, have concerns about new environmental damage that may result from the process of fracking.

Sometimes, extremes in political ideologies cause environmental problems. For example, harsh dictatorships or extremes in capitalist systems driven by greed prevent reasonable solutions. In western thought we may confuse capitalism and free enterprise with democracy. Some Canadian mining companies in third-world countries pay insufficient attention to good ecological practices. To put the message more positively, we must learn to respect the worth and dignity and needs of other people, including those who live outside Canada.

A humanist principle which is frequently adopted by both religious and secular thinkers states the following: We affirm that human beings are a part of nature, and that our survival is dependent upon a healthy planet which provides us and other forms of life with a life-supporting environment.

Hopefully our teachers will encourage students to become knowledgeable about environmental problems and solutions. The study of geography and of other cultures can help students become aware of the needs of others. Science can provide knowledge concerning where we are failing to protect our environment. Science can also help improve on our best knowledge in environmental practices. History can offer advice on what practices have served humanity well and which practices have failed us.

Teachers who teach their students that a healthy environment is very important will find that each school subject whether it is literature, mathematics, art, or chemistry can lend itself to enhancing the importance of a healthy environment. Teachers who do so can provide a great service in helping to keep our environment vibrant now and in the future.