

5 Practical Measures to Turn Around Our Declining Environment

There is ample reason for us to be seriously concerned about the state of the earth and the life systems that comprise it.

On Earth Day 2019, I'm choosing to focus on five practical measures, a "five-fold path" if you will, which I believe offer us a measure of hope and certainly plenty to do.

1. Fall in love with nature.

It is Matthew Fox, priest and eco-justice theologian, who admonishes us accordingly, "I propose that we can fall in love several times a day for the rest of our lives. You could fall in love with the galaxies - there are 1 trillion out there.

"You could fall in love with species of wild flowers, of which there are still 10,000 on this planet; you could fall in love with fish and plants, trees, animals and birds, and with people, especially those who are different from us."

Love generally proceeds from relationship. Nothing is more important than spending time with the one you love.

Similarly, putting ourselves in situations where we are able to feel, touch, listen to, wonder about, be vulnerable to nature will form the basis upon which respect, awe and love proceed.

Apart from taking time to hike, play and meditate in nature, consider getting your hands dirty. Plant trees or gardens. Learn names and study the habits of birds, plants and animals.

2. Eat wisely.

In addition to choosing food that is grown using sustainable practices, consider the fact that 30% of food produced globally is wasted. That waste produces up to 10% of the greenhouse gases that bring about climate change.

Composting is a good solution on the back end but preventing waste in the first place is a much better option. Be mindful also of the fact that meat agriculture accounts for 15% of all greenhouse gases produced.

Reducing consumption of red meat in particular or adopting the practice of using meat as a garnish rather than a standalone protein are both good practices.

3. Use less / use better.

The basic reality is that more people using more stuff equals diminished natural resources, more waste and more pollution. Arguments suggesting a goal of

Western consumption patterns applied globally fail to take into account that this would require three earths.

The only viable alternative to the gross imbalance in consumption is for some to “step down” in order that others be elevated to livable norms. Adding “redistribute” and “refuse” to our current three “Rs” of reduce, recycle and reuse is essential.

While we’re at it, how about challenging our disposable culture? The amount and type of plastic waste that is beginning to clog our landfills and waterways is literally choking life in our oceans and other critical ecosystems.

4. Opt for renewables.

Among the largest and definitely the most publicized contributor to our changing climate globally is the use of fossil fuels for transportation, energy production and manufacturing.

The good news is that as prices drop for alternative energy production methods, a shift toward renewables like solar, wind and geothermal is inevitable.

We can do our part by demanding the replacement of dirty energy production like coal and encouraging the adoption of electric cars and mass transit systems, electricity produced by independent solar producers and more efficient means of heating and lighting systems.

5. Share.

Seems like a no brainer, doesn't it? Getting to know our neighbors, building community together and sharing some things in common are highly preferable to the mass individual consumption of our present moment.

We can certainly learn from our global neighbors in this regard. Community cooperatives, tool exchanges, ride shares and so on are all simple solutions with multiple benefits.

Those of us who were born into wealth or who have been fortunate enough to accumulate enough material resource to ensure the well-being of our own family should consider appropriate means of assisting other families.

Giving toward faith community outreach, supporting children's (especially females) education globally or simply sharing food and other resources with the needy around us are all appropriate ways of addressing imbalances to which we have become all too accustomed.

Finally, in addition to the action steps above, people of faith need to engage in serious theological reflection about our relationship to the created "other" and the presence of the Spirit of God in the material world.

"Incarnation literally means enfleshment, yet most of Christian history has, in fact, been excarnational - in flight from matter, embodiment, physicality and this world," Richard Rohr suggests. "This avoidance of enfleshment is much more

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Platonic than Christian. Incarnation means that the spiritual nature of reality (the immaterial, the formless, the invisible) and the material (the physical, the forms, that which we can see and touch) are, in fact, one and the same!”

This earth is our home.

Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of articles for Earth Day 2019 (April 22).