

GROWING Together

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TEN ROOMS? FOUR BATHS?

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!*
– William Wordsworth (1802)

Most people live in cities. We are drawn to towns and cities by job opportunities, better schools, superior medical care, and the variety of entertainment. Cities have always been associated with culture. Think of Athens, Rome, Paris, London.

Despite the advantages of city life, there are drawbacks, some so serious that the future of the planet may hinge on a reconsideration of our life style. The longer we live in cities and the bigger the cities become, the less we know of the world beyond city limits. We may know where to buy kiwis, asparagus or sirloin, but nothing about their production. Water flows endlessly when we turn a tap, but we don't know much about rivers and oceans. A flick of a switch gives us light, yet in our cities we seldom look at the star-studded sky. Most of what we do "know" of nature is superficial, something we've seen on television or from a car window as we hurtle from one city to another at 110 km an hour. Few of us realize how small our planet really is, how rapidly six billion people are using up its resources, how much climate change is already affecting us.



The evidence is all around us that the majority are prepared to sacrifice beauty, complexity, wilderness, even plant and animal species, if we think there's a chance of more jobs, cheaper food, faster transportation, larger houses, and bigger box stores. Yet, if we persist in those attitudes, we'll soon be forced to sacrifice more than we ever imagined. Future wars will be fought over fresh water and farmable land.

And where do we stand as Christians? For too long we have interpreted Genesis as a licence to exploit the earth. In the words of Stan Rowe, Canadian ecologist, "We considered the earth as resource, not source." That can't be our position now. We're going to have to play catch-up, and quickly. We can no longer afford the luxury of ignorance and indifference. What is needed is action and example. Soil, air and water must be saved from further degradation. Try to imagine the earth our children and grandchildren will inhabit fifty years from now if we continue our unquestioned overuse of earth's limited resources? Change will require committed families, dedicated communities, revised school curricula, and political action.

It's as important to save the planet as it is to save souls. We are called to be faithful stewards of creation. A needful first step is to become better acquainted with wilderness and solitude. There we'll find God, recognizing with John Muir, that "every natural object is a conductor of divinity". In schools we can insist that instead of three R's, there'll be five. To "Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic", we'll add *Reverence* for creation and *Respect* for life in all its forms. Only through getting to know and love the natural world, will we be prepared to save it. Politicians will fall into line when they see that their constituents are more interested in conservation than mindless expansion.

We'll know that change has finally arrived when the 10-room house with four bathrooms will seem ostentatious rather than necessary.



The Growing Together 2003 writing team is Rev. Colin Clay (Anglican), Rev. Anita Jantz (Mennonite), Sr. Anne Keffer (Lutheran), Frank Roy (Roman Catholic), Rev. Betty Lynn Schwab (United). Co-editors are Rev. Betty Lynn Schwab and Frank Roy.

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Ecumenism

Prairie Centre for Ecumenism
250-B Second Avenue South
Saskatoon, SK S7K 1K9
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phone: (306)-653-1633
fax: (306) 653-1821
email: pce@ecumenism.net
www.ecumenism.net