



**BISHOP MICHAEL PFEIFER, O.M.I.**  
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of San Angelo

## **World Water Day and World Earth Day are Linked and Flow Together**

In a few weeks, we will be celebrating two very significant Creation Days: **World Water Day, March 22<sup>nd</sup>**; **World Earth Day, April 22<sup>nd</sup>**. These two days, while distinct, are obviously very closely linked and flow together as they focus on the great-God given gift of Creation, our planet, and its relationship to the wider universe. They flow together as water is the major component of our earth, as oceans form the biggest surface of earth, and all life on earth depends on water. And earth with what is underneath it and on top of it, with its atmosphere, is the major source for producing water. These two wonderful creation days, while closely linked, each focuses on a special dimension of our common home, earth.

In this presentation, I give a brief description of World Water Day and World Earth Day and their meaning for the planet on which we live, and how the theme and purpose of each day is a call for all humanity to show much greater appreciation and respect for our planet which Pope Francis calls our Common Home. The Pope points out specific ways all humans can show greater concern and care for mother earth and how we can protect it from more abuse and destruction by we humans. As guardians of the environment, we are to ensure the proper balance of the ecosystems on which all people depend.

### **We focus on World Water Day**

First, we focus on World Water Day, whose theme for 2023 is Accelerating Change. What is World Water Day? World Water Day is an annual United Nations Observance that started in 1993 focusing on the importance of Water, coordinated by UN-Water and led by one or more U-Water members and partners. This wonderful creation day celebrates Water and raises awareness of the 2 billion people living without access to safe water. It is about taking action to tackle the global water crisis. A core focus of WWD is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030). In preparation for March 22<sup>nd</sup>, people and organizations hold earlier World Water Day events in accord with the theme Accelerating Change and participate in the global campaign launched in the preceding months by UN-Water and social media. On World Water Day itself, the UN World Water Development Report is released focusing on the same topics as the campaign and recommending policy direction to decision makers.

This WWD is about accelerating change to solve the water and sanitation crisis. Because water affects us all we need everyone to take action. You and your family, school, church, and community can make a difference by changing the way you use, consume and manage water in your lives. Some action steps. Save water: take shorter showers and don't let the tap run when brushing teeth, preparing food, and doing dishes. Make it equal: share water gathering between men and women, girls, and boys. Flush safe: fixing leaking water and waste pipes, empty full septic tanks and report dumping of sludge. Stop polluting: don't put food waste, oils, medicine and chemicals down the toilet or drains. Eat local: buy local seasonal foods and look for products made with less water. Be curious: find out where my water comes from and how it is shared and visit a treatment plant to see how our waste is managed. Protect nature: plant a tree or create a rain garden—use natural solutions to reduce the risk of flooding and store water. Build pressure: write to my elected representatives about budgets for improving water at home and abroad. Clean up: take part in cleanups at my local rivers, lakes, wetlands, or beaches. (Taken from US Water, World Water Day 2023 Accelerating Change.

### **World Earth Day 2023**

The theme for **World Earth Day 2023**: Invest in Your Planet (Get Inspired. Take Action. Be a part of the green revolution). The website [www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org) describes the history of this special day. The 1960s saw a dramatic increase in environmental concerns in the US. With several environmental catastrophes, many Americans felt the need to take a more proactive approach in the stewardship of our planet. To avoid future environmental disasters, Senator Gaylord Nelson, from Wisconsin established the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, to bring light to the issues of environmental responsibilities and transforming the public attitude. That day left a permanent impact on the politics of America. Earth Day was the push the nation needed and not long after that, Congress passed several major initiatives that would become the foundation of our nation's environmental laws. Beginning in 1990, Earth Day went global. A day that mobilized more than 200 million people in 141 countries to begin the fight for the environment to the global stage. Earth Day continues to grow, and more than 1 billion people took action for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day in 2010. In 2020, Earth Day marked 50 years of environmental activism and showed no signs of slowing down.

Presently, there is a world-wide concern on the danger of Climate Change which affects the present and future of our entire planet. In our Planet, the United Nations has called its latest climate report a “Code Red for Humanity”. The report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration states that the earth is arguably in worse shape than ever. Scientific evidence is clear that irrefutable-human activity is causing our planet to warm at an alarming rate. We need to act boldly, innovate broadly, and implement equitably. Pope Francis focuses on “ecological conversion” for decisions that can no longer be postponed. This conversion calls for new lifestyles

based on development, sustainability and cooperation between human beings and the environment. Society must explore all options to identify the best opportunities to make our planet more hospitable for generations to come. It's going to take all of us, international, national, and local governments, businesses, churches, schools, and all citizens on earth to form a partnership to protect and preserve our planet.

Governments and businesses should invest in renewables and energy solutions and spend on a variety of technologies from wind and solar farms to carbon offsets, carbon capture and biofuels. This is a time for energy transition and to diversify away from fossil fuels, the combustion of which is the primary drive of climate change.

International bodies of scientists warn that we have over a decade to avoid the most devastating impact of climate change on our food supply, national security, global health, extreme weather and more. There is simply no time to waste.

Everyone has the ability to do something to address our climate challenge. What can we do about Climate Change? EARTHDAY.org recommends the following: Get Informed: Knowledge is power-learn about the science behind our climate change and responsibility that all sectors of society hold in addressing this issue. Students in every school should receive environmental education with a strong civic engagement component. Hold Yourself Accountable: Make your own personal impact on the planet and encourage family and friends to do the same. Our responsibility for God's earth means that we need to respect natural laws and the delicate equilibria existing between all creatures of this world. Consider offsetting carbon emissions by investing in clean and renewable energy projects around the world, beginning with your local community. Unplug: Use energy more effectively beginning with your home. Unplug items when they are not in use. Buy goods with high energy efficient standards and consider making the switch to renewable energy. Travel Smarter: Transportation is now the largest carbon emissions. Take public transit, biking or walking when possible. It is good for your health and the planet. Climate Action, one bite at a time: Your foods carbon footprint is the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the growing, harvesting, processing, transporting, cooking, and disposing of the foods we eat. Also, food waste is an enormous hidden contributor to climate change. Avoid plastic items especially single users. Shop Smarter: Support companies driven by sustainability and committed to transparency. Your power as a consumer can be enormously impactful. Vote Earth: Consider climate issues at local, national, and global levels. Carefully study the environmental platforms of your candidates. Organize: One person can make a difference but together we can make a movement. Invest and divest: Use your funds to increase clean energy companies. Show your support: By supporting programs and organizations that are fighting climate change and working on the ground to make a difference. Earth Day is that special day to remind ourselves how we are to protect and care for our beautiful planet Earth that sustains our life needs and how we are to share in a loving way these gifts of God with others that belong to all the people on earth. Mother Earth nourishes us without asking anything in exchange. She cannot continue to do so if we do not take care of her.

## **We Need to Celebrate These Two Special Days of Creation**

As we celebrate these two special days of Creation, we seriously reflect on many recent reports that human activity is warming our planet at alarming rates. These activities are affecting many events around the world, causing tremendous harm to people today and great threats to the future of generations yet to be born. The unprecedented wildfires, heat waves, droughts, storms, and flooding in our nation and around the world are tragic examples of what the future holds. At the same time, solutions exist now that can help slow and even reverse this warming creating a healthy and thriving future for all people. Some scientists propose thinking of new solutions like climate engineering, which is a fascinating new area of research, but we do not know all the effects that might arise. To move this vision forward, we must strengthen our nation's moral and political will to care for the common good.

Pope Francis in his environmental encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, invites us to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and those most affected by the harm done to our environment. He stresses for us in his message, "to show mercy to our common home". Because of the devastation done to the environment, Francis points out that thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence nor convey their message to us. He affirms that "an integral ecology emphasizes human beings are deeply connected with all of creation". When we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings. At the same time, each creature has its own intrinsic value that must be respected.

The beautiful creation that surrounds us is a chalice of grace from our Creator. It is gracious because it reveals God's abundance goodness. These two wonderful creation days calls us to thank God for our beautiful Common Home and pray and work to preserve it for future generations. This grace, this goodness is found everywhere and if treated with disrespect and abuse is blasphemy. The imprint of the Creator, as the Patron of the environment, St. Francis, teaches us, is found in all of creation especially in humans. The environment is sacred as it comes from the Holy hand of the Creator and to ruthlessly exploit it, is a sacrilege.