



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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# ***Feast of St. Francis Oct. 4 is appropriate day for environmental rally, say organizers***

Thirty years after Pope John Paul II named St. Francis of Assisi as patron saint of ecology, the beloved saint's upcoming feast day provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the sacredness of creation and our responsibility to care for the earth as "kin and family," says Sr. Judy Schachtel, SMS.

Along with Tony Haynes of the Office for Justice and Peace for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, Schachtel is assisting a Clean Green Saskatchewan committee organizing a rally and march calling for a focus on renewable energy sources rather than nuclear power – an event that happens to fall on the saint's feast day, Sunday, Oct. 4.

The son of a rich merchant father, St. Francis threw off rank and riches to go and live simply in harmony with God, with creation and with his fellow creatures, Schachtel described. "In his simplicity Francis got reconnected to the natural world," she said, describing the saint's understanding that all the elements and creatures of the earth are family and citing his canticle of praise to God that speaks about "brother sun" or "sister water."

"For the first 1500 years of Christendom, there was a sense that saw earth as a sacred place," says Schachtel, describing St. Augustine's writings in the third century about two books of revelation – the book of sacred scripture and the book of creation. Through the centuries, Christian mystics have recognized humanity's integral relationship to the sacred earth created by God. "What's so exciting for us today is to recognize that the mystics – Francis, Hildegard of Bingen and others of the 12th –13th century – grasped mystically what science is now revealing to us: exactly how interconnected we are."

However, in recent centuries, this understanding of an interconnected, sacred creation has been lost, Schachtel related. "We've lost our sense of the sacred and we've tried to take over, breaking that sense of sacred connection in the name of economics and material gain."

She cited the words of the late Fr. Thomas Berry, an American Passionist priest and "eco-theologian" who said that the earth is a subject to be in communion with, rather than an object to be exploited.

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In recent years, popes and bishops have also called for the faithful to re-establish a world view that recognizes the sacredness of creation and our interconnectedness, Schachtel pointed out, citing the 2008 pastoral letter on the environment the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). “Ecological challenges offer us an opportunity to embark once more on the paths of the Gospel,” states the bishops’ letter, calling for conversion. “A moral crisis must be met with conversion, which is a change in perspective, attitudes and behaviour. Essentially, this conversion is aimed at the ruptures we have created with nature, with our neighbour and with God. It has to focus on re-establishing a relationship, that is, creating a climate of reconciliation.”

Haynes said the belief that the earth and its resources exist purely for economic exploitation is being called into question by more and more people in the light of climate change and events such as the Asian tsunami and hurricane Katrina, increasing threats to the water supply, the environmental devastation of the tarsands, as well as health and ecological concerns related to nuclear power, nuclear waste and uranium mining.

“We have got to the point where we are realizing that renewable energy sources are what is needed – that we must find alternatives that are not harmful to God’s creation,” Haynes said.

Schachtel said renewable sources of energy are preferable to nuclear energy, especially as we do not know what to do with radioactive waste and tailings that remain toxic for hundreds of thousands of years. “We’re putting all of creation at risk,” she said. “Do we want the next 800 generations to have to look after the mess?”

It’s time to realize that the earth is a living system, with great gifts of sun and wind, she stressed. “We are one little planet, one little home. How do we reclaim that sense of communion with the world? The earth is God’s gift: we must care for it,” said Schachtel.

**The “No Nukes - Go Renewables” march and rally begins 1 p.m. Sunday Oct. 4** at the University of Saskatchewan bowl, before proceeding downtown to the Vimy Memorial bandshell for presentations, which will include guest speaker Winona LaDuke, a Native American activist, environmentalist and writer.