

Earth Day, April 22, 2016

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Each year since 1970, citizens of planet Earth have commemorated Earth Day on April 22. It is both a celebration of our deep interconnection to the Earth and an expression of concern for the damage being done to our common home.

Earth Day 1970 marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement.

At that time, Americans were driving huge sedans with V8 engines that guzzled fuel and emitted particles from leaded gas. Factories belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of consequences or legal action. Air and water pollution from coal fired power plants and other industries was simply accepted as a sign of prosperity. Most of us has little interest in caring for the natural world.

The Earth Day website explains: “Although mainstream America largely remained oblivious to environmental concerns, the stage had been set for change by the publication of Rachel Carson’s bestseller *Silent Spring* in 1962. The book represented a watershed moment, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24 countries, and beginning to raise public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment, and links between pollution and public health.”

In 1971, on the 80th anniversary of the publication of *Rerum Novarum* – a foundational text for Catholic social teaching – Pope Paul VI published an apostolic letter in which he listed 11 new social problems that the Church should confront. This is the first statement by the church on care for the environment. The papal document acknowledged: “Man (sic) is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation.” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, Pope Paul VI)

On Care for Our Common Home (*Laudato Si'*) is the recent encyclical by Pope Francis addressed to “every person living on this planet” for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. Pope Francis calls the church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of our environmental challenges and to bring forth a new way of being human on the planet. He speaks of an integral ecology – “one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” of the environmental crisis.

When members of the Holy Cross Passionist family gather in Detroit in June 2016, we will add the voice of our unique charism – focusing on the suffering in human community and within the planet itself. We will be participating in great awakening.