

## TOO MANY PEOPLE?



Sometime this year the world's population will reach the seven billion mark. Many environmental groups advocate for population control as a solution to climate change. Here in Oregon, *The Oregonian* printed a front page guest piece on its Opinion section about overpopulation being the root cause of our environmental problems. (*Treading on a Taboo*, Jack Hart; The Oregonian, June 15, 2008).

Yes, all things considered, overpopulation is an environmental problem *when we consume too much of the world's resources.*

**Did you know?** While the U.S. represents about five percent of the global population, it consumes about 25% of the world's energy, and generates five times the world average of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The U.S. uses more energy than any other country and is the largest carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) greenhouse gas emitter among industrialized nations worldwide.

The following formula illustrates the relationship between population and consumption:  
Global Population x Resource Consumption per Person = Global Consumption of Resources.  
When Global Population increases then assuming that Resource Consumption per Person remains constant then Global Consumption of Resources will rise.

If Global Population remains constant but Resource Consumption per Person increases (people use more resources), then Global Consumption of Resources will also rise.

**But if Global Population increases but our use of Resource Consumption per Person decreases a commensurate percentage then Global Consumption of Resources remains unchanged.**

Climate change is a crisis issue. There is no doubt that the earth is suffering from an unhealthy warming of the climate. The only legitimate debate is whether climate change is caused by man and natural causes or by man alone. But the earth's climate is changing and it is imprudent for man not to change his habits when creation struggles and the poor suffer, especially since neither the poor nor creation has the resources to adapt.

The Catholic Church believes that the solution to tackling the climate crisis is not fewer people, but for man, especially the *relatively wealthy nations and people*, to change his habits. "It is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment" (Pope Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message*, 2010, 7).

"We must find a simple way of living. For it is not right that the standard of living of the rich countries would seek to maintain itself by draining off a great part of the reserves of energy and raw materials that are meant to serve the whole of humanity." (Pope John Paul II, *Homily at Yankee Stadium*, October 2, 1979)

**Did you know?** According to the Environmental Protection Agency, food leftovers are the single-largest component of the waste stream by weight in the United States. The decomposition of food and other organic waste in landfills produces methane, a greenhouse gas 33 times more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide.

Landfills account for 22 percent of all methane emissions.



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**Did you know?** The single biggest contributor of methane is livestock; when we eat more meat—and most of our meat comes from massive cattle factories—then we are responsible for more, and larger, cattle farms and as a result, more methane.

Livestock accounts for 25 percent of all methane emissions

“[T]he ecological crisis cannot be viewed in isolation from other related questions, since it is closely linked to the notion of development itself and our understanding of man in his relationship to others and to the rest of creation. Prudence would thus dictate a *profound, long-term review of our model of development*, one which would take into consideration the meaning of the economy and its goals with an eye to correcting its malfunctions and misapplications. The ecological health of the planet calls for this, but it is also demanded by the cultural and moral crisis of humanity whose symptoms have for some time been evident in every part of the world.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message, 2010*, 5)

**Did you know?** The United States ranks first out of 212 countries in oil consumption, first in oil imports, and 102nd in the price of gasoline?

“Natural resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on living creatures, human and not, present and future; that the protection of private property does not conflict with the universal destination of goods; that human activity does not compromise the fruitfulness of the earth, for the benefit of people now and in the future.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message, 2010*, 8)

**Did you know?** Over a billion trees are used to make disposable diapers every year.

[T]echnologically advanced societies must be prepared to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency. “It is therefore necessary to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 36.)

**Did you know?** The average U.S. home size was 2330 square feet, up from 1400 square feet in 1970. In the U.S., the average grocery store's produce travels nearly 1,500 miles between the farm where it was grown and your refrigerator. By buying locally we reduce the number of food miles our food travels from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer. Farmers' Markets and CSA's reduce the amount of energy required to grow and transport the food to you by one fifth, thus practicing the U.S. Catholic teaching "Care for God's Creation."

**Did you know?** A typical carrot travels 1,838 miles to reach your dinner table. The food miles for items in the grocery store are, on average, 27 times higher than the food miles for goods bought from local sources.

There is no easy way to alter our course and move towards a simpler lifestyle, say, where the U.S. represents five percent of the global population, consumes five percent of the world's energy, and generates less than the world average of CO2 emissions. Demonstrably reducing our conveniences such as disposable diapers, conveniently large homes, meat, green lawns, SUVs, and “summertime fruits” from Chile in winter, and changing the culture of consumerism from which springs products of convenience would help. The slogan “Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle” lights our path *if we advance in that order*. That is, recycling, while necessary, is only the third option.

No matter how we arrive, overpopulation is an environmental problem when we, the living of today, consume more than our share of the world's resources while the billions of suffering poor, the handiwork and creation of God, and the generations still to come, all go without.



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