

OVERVIEW OF THE ST. IGNATIUS ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE (2006 – 2017)

Formed in 2006, as a result of a parish survey, Fr. Massie s.j asked Mary Jane Eason and Richard Lebrun to form the St. Ignatius Environment Committee (EC).

Wanting to understand and emphasize the spiritual and theological underpinnings of creation and creation care as a legitimate part of our faith, the energized group acquired excellent theological books on the subject which were then donated to the church library. Through these books they identified the goals of the Environmental Committee:

- 1) To provide education to increase awareness of the environment and society's impact on it.
- 2) To promote reduce, reuse and recycle in the church and community to minimize the impact on the environment.

As part of the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment United Nations Environment Programme, Mary Jane was given a handbook "Earth and Faith A book of Reflection for Action" to further the groups knowledge of what other groups were doing. The group also connected to the University of Winnipeg's Theology Department which had received funding for a David Suzuki sponsored program "Greening Our Sacred Spaces." This program aimed to get churches on board with environmental programs. Very unexpectedly the committee was given a grant of \$1,000.00 towards promoting the cause of Greening Our Sacred Spaces!

The committee continued to educate themselves at monthly meetings through the purchase of books and the sharing of information. They invited speakers to talk to the group and offered educational events for parishioners. The film "The Inconvenient Truth" by Al Gore was shown to parishioners in the church with Sister Idalena 'Ferriera graciously offering the opening prayer.

Over the years the Environmental Committee has hosted educational events by showing films followed by discussion. Some of the films were "Renewing the Sacred Balance", Blue Gold (with Maude Barlow), films on theologian Thomas Berry, and poet and environmental activist Wendell Berry. A locally produced film by film maker Tadashi Oruri and artistic director Thor Aikenhead, titled "The Scars of Mercury" chronicled the effects of mercury contamination of the Winnipeg and Wabigoon River system on the residents of Grassy Narrows and White Dog Reserve. Other presentations were on Climate Change, Private Public Partnerships (when the city was about to hire Veolia, a French corporation to manage the city's waste water) and Genetic Modification of our Food with Fr John Perry sj. Mark Birch gave several presentations on "Voluntary Simplicity" and theologian Arthur Walker Jones, author of "The Green Psalter" spoke about the analysis of the Bible for earth's voice. The committee also provided articles for the Parish News and actively attended presentations and interfaith conferences such as the Creation Care Conference. Michael and Peter Kreesta, youngest members of the committee showed a film called "Rain Forest." The film highlighted how cutting down a single tree in the rain forest is the destruction of an entire ecosystem.

To raise funds in an environmental and ethical way, the committee sold fair trade coffee from Ecuador, packaged in hand-woven colorful bags, as well as "soap nuts," a dried fruit from the Mulberry tree that produce saponins useful in cleaning clothes. Those who purchased soap nuts helped support a livelihood to poor families in Bangladesh who harvest these fruits for sale. The soap nuts worked well, were cheaper than regular detergents and produced no harmful by products. Appealing posters titled "The Green Rule" featuring a tree with leaves on which the names of every religion that alludes to the tree in a sacred way were also sold.

The money fundraised was used in purchasing books, offering programs and providing a bicycle rack for parishioners who cycled to church. Workshops for the Sunday school students after mass were offered using the “Green Rule” poster as a teaching tool.

Several Green Fairs were hosted with Manitoba Eco-Network providing information on composting, Fr Gerry sj was very encouraging in these endeavours. Another event held in the church hall with speaker and refreshments featured the art work of the parish youth as they understood the environment and the need to be environmentally responsible. The pictures were very insightful revealing the natural wisdom of children. They were left for display for quite some time after the event.

Taking direct action was a big part of the work of the Environment Committee. The first undertaking was to transition away from disposable cups and use real cups and cutlery. The EC collected cups from parishioners and donated them as well, then concurrently began purchasing certified compostable cups from the Waste Reduction Store to be used when there were large events.

The committee battled against the use of Styrofoam for years and eventually developed a policy pamphlet for St. Ignatius Church which was endorsed by Fr Gerry. They also reached out to St. Ignatius School and became involved with their social justice students. The students envisioned having one lunch day in the school year that would be free of garbage. Several members of the environment committee met with the students of St. Ignatius to discuss their project. The young students became the speakers for Social Justice Sunday. The project may have proved to be unrealistic, but it ignited environmental initiatives at the school that continue to this day. It also highlighted how a seemingly simple thing as having a garbage-free lunch for one day was a task beyond the capabilities of the school’s social justice committee. It illustrated how deeply attached we are to disposables especially ones made of plastic.

Another initiative undertaken by the committee was facilitating a gardening project at the school, with Jen Kornelson from A Rocha, a Christian environmental organization. Grade 5 students planted seeds in the classroom then later planted a garden near the rectory where Fr. Monty grew some vegetables. The children's contribution added to his garden produce. Fr. Monty was most diligent in composting and the garden proved to be a great place to add the coffee grounds from Sunday coffee!

Society is addicted to the convenience of disposables, which comes at a cost of depleting the earth’s natural resources and contaminating our land and water. Our consumptive lifestyle is not sustainable. The idea of having a zero waste church was being tested at St. Ignatius. Through trial and error the EC developed a waste management system. One member who was very helpful was Louise Jutras who purchased bins and made labels so that biodegradables, recyclables, and trash could be separated in color coded bins. The services of Samborski Environmental Ltd. provided pick up service which continues today. Trying to become a zero waste church, meant purchasing certified compostable dishes and cutlery to replace Styrofoam and plastic forks. These materials were initially acquired through our fundraising, and now are part of the normal costs of the parish.

The first committees to adopt the use of certified compostables for their events was the First Communion Committee headed up by Lucile Vogrig and the El Sitio Committee, under Janet Zonneveld and Nerina Robson. There was a flurry of events at the church every spring and summer which kept the small environmental committee very busy helping with the waste management aspect of things.

It would be wonderful to say that everything went smoothly, however even with the best of intentions there were challenges. Learning by trial and error and introducing new ways of doing things were not readily accepted. The group had to devise all manner of ploys to prevent people from throwing compostable items into the garbage. Garbage cans were hidden behind tables however people would find them and use them. In line with Development & Peace's water campaign the use of bottled water at church events was discouraged. The committee was not winning popularity prizes.

The EC has succeeded in the use of fair trade coffee for its events. Certified compostables are now being purchased by the office. The Knights of Columbus support the committee's initiatives and have added some of their own such as the introduction of LED lights in the church and school. St. Ignatius School is taking on environmental initiatives as well with projects such as disposable battery collection and disposal. The Education Centre also has a compostable and recycling collection, thanks to the efforts of Valerie Forrest and Father Joe's encouragement.

More recently the St. Ignatius Environment Committee with the approval of Fr. Frank offered a petition to parishioners of St. Ignatius Church in November 2016 opposing the location of the Energy East Pipeline. The pipeline potentially poses a serious threat to our drinking water and to the aquifers and watershed through which the pipeline will run. Water being a sacred gift from the Creator should be protected. This petition was done in conjunction with five other churches.

Another more recent endeavor was the involvement of the St. Ignatius Environment Committee in the SYNOD process. We provided a submission for the SYNOD along with a thoughtful and compelling document composed by Nicole Boudreau.

The Environmental Committee looks forward to renewing their involvement with St. Ignatius School and to continue with the gradual work of greening our sacred spaces. As well they will continue to share their knowledge and work to care and respect creation as part of our everyday life, and as an integral part of our spirituality.

Thank you to:

- Richard Lebrun who co-chaired and remained on the committee until he left Winnipeg the summer of 2014.
- Kathleen (Boylan) Licoppe for setting high standards for disposables and for making Certified Compostables available
- Ceil Gira and Bill Hrynko for your many years of dedicated service on the committee
- Fennella Timmerman who spread the word on composting and introduced the waste management program to St. Peter's church
- Louise Jutras for the guidance around Waste Management
- Alicia Ordonez who represented the Spanish Community and brought them on board
- Father Brian Massie for mandating the formation of the Environment Committee
- Father Gerry who supported our endeavours over the years
- Father Frank Obrigewitsch for his support
- Father Joe Newman who encouraged us along the way
- The committee leaders and the Knights of Columbus who supported our endeavours and endorsed and put into practice environmental policies
- The parishioners of St. Ignatius Church who were our teachers

Current committee members are:

Mary Jane Eason (Chair)

Mariette Bayer

Patricia Dodd

Theresa Birkoltz

Erich Van Schie

Kathleen Licoppe

Nicole Boudreau

Jens Franck

Carolina Penuela Parrado