

Catholic Sentinel

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Book shows why, how of creation stewardship

By Ed Langlois
OF THE SENTINEL

Pam Wood speaks both Catholicism and environmentalism.

The 42-year-old member of St. Andrew Parish pipes up for the church when her colleagues in the ecological movement are blaming Christianity for the globe's ills. She also challenges her faith community to take issues like climate change seriously.

Wood, a counselor at De

La Salle North Catholic High School and a retreat leader, has teamed up with two well-known Franciscans to write a book that offers science, theology and practical ways to wed faith and envi-



PAM WOOD

ronmental stewardship.

Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth, is published by St. Anthony Messenger Press. Wood wrote with Sister Iliia Delio, a theologian at Washington Theological Union, and Father Keith Douglass Warner, who teaches environmental studies at Santa Clara University.

Echoing ideas of the great biblical prophets, the authors say that humans are out of

right relationship with the earth. They suggest that Francis, that man in our birdbaths, could help the environmental movement succeed.

"If Francis were alive today, he'd see creation crucified at our hands," says Wood, who has led retreats both for the Archdiocese of Portland Office of Justice and Peace and Catholic Relief Services.

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Blanchet School begins Sparrow Club chapter

SALEM — Sparrow Clubs USA, a non profit group that sponsors children undergoing a medical crisis, now has a chapter at Blanchet School in Salem. The clubs provide support to a patient's family and school.

Students at the school earn \$10 for the family for every hour of service they provide. This winter, students at Blanchet adopted their own classmate, Lauren Tolento, a junior who suffered traumatic brain injuries in a head-on collision in November.

Members of the Blanchet Sparrow Club wanted to use Tolento's case as a catalyst

to raise awareness about issues impacting their school community and to inspire positive change on campus. "Life's a Gift" is the theme of this full week of impact and awareness.

Life's a Gift week starts Sunday, April 20, with a concert, chicken dinner, variety show and a raffle drawing. The afternoon's events begin at 1 p.m. with the variety show beginning at 2 p.m. Musical entertainment will be provided by Julie Hoy, Blanchet students and the Severin Sisters. All profits benefit the Sparrow Club. Cost is \$10.

Each following day will

feature an assembly and guest speaker. Topics include peer pressure, friendship, driving safety and service to others.

Several activities have also been planned in honor of the week. McTeacher Night takes place on Wednesday, April 23, at the Lancaster and D Street McDonalds. Blanchet teachers and staff will work at the restaurant from 4 to 7 p.m. with 50 percent of the proceeds benefiting the Sparrow Club.

A service field trip to the Ronald McDonald House in Portland is planned for Thursday, April 24. Several students will donate their

time to help with yard work around the house.

Life's a Gift week closes with a jog-a-thon from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 26.

The event takes place at the McKay High School track and all proceeds benefit the Sparrow Club.

"Lauren's faith and perseverance are a true inspiration," says Brandy O'Bannon, development director and advisor for Life's a Gift week. "All of us at Blanchet are blessed by knowing her."

Organizers hope the week will become an annual event.

Catholic Charities program aims to help couples

Stephanie Hanna, an undergraduate at George Fox University, is an intern for Catholic Charities. She has put her academic learning into practice by assisting in the Between Us program.

Between Us is a free educational program available to teens, singles, pre-marital and married couples. The teen curriculum includes topics such as maturity, values,

infatuation vs. attraction, peer pressure and communication. Recently, Hanna helped present the program to more than 40 teens at an alternative high school. Some were slow to warm up, but soon many of the students were fully engaged. They enjoyed the creative activities and seemed eager to apply the information to their lives.

One of the activities they

enjoyed was called a values auction. Each student had \$200 to bid on the values that were the most important to them. Many valued a social life and physical fitness over education and obedience.

"We discussed how values are influenced by family, culture and popular media," Hanna says. "I discovered that what I value at a slightly older age has changed sig-

nificantly from when I was in high school."

She is looking forward to diving further into the curriculum.

"It is clear to me that almost anyone can benefit from these classes," says Hanna. "Some may not be able to apply the learning to their lives right now, but they will appreciate having the knowledge in the future."

Wood

In the book, Father Warner offers much of the science and Sister Delio does the heavy lifting in theology. Wood used her expertise in practical prayer and actions to help people do what it takes to solve the ecological crisis over the long haul.

This book is meant for continued use, not a single reading. Its intended audiences are parish social justice committees, teachers, parish study groups and book clubs.

The main idea is to help people develop, as St. Francis of Assisi did in the 12th century, a relationship with God's creation.

Wood is convinced that without God in the picture, the environmental movement is missing something vital to its success — a deeper meaning and a deeper love. At the same time, she believes churches have an obligation to act in such a massive crisis.

"If we don't jump on board, I would say the church will die because we are not responding to the true need," Wood says.

Of course, St. Francis did not live through worldwide ecological crises, because there were none 800 years ago. But Wood is convinced that were he here now, he would see creation — which he spoke of in familiar terms — as crucified by our "voracious consumption levels."

In response, Wood offers reflections, prayers and activities to create focus and turn the global warming angst into action on the local level. That is the only way to sustain the work that will save the planet, she insists.

"Contemplation is not navel gazing, it is really looking and seeing what's true, which is what Francis did," says Wood. "If you really take it in, you are converted."

Wood and the other authors recall that as a young man, Francis hid from some ugly truths. Chief among them were the lepers around Assisi. But he eventually

came to embrace them. That's an example of how we can move into seeing the truth of the damaged earth and loving it back to health, Wood says.

The authors take Christ's famous call to Francis — "Rebuild my house . . . which is falling completely to ruin" — and bring it into modernity. As Francis carried the call from the bricks and mortar of San Damiano to the discipleship of the Church, so Delio, Warner and Wood apply the mission to the Earth, which can reasonably be called God's house, too.

Fifteen years ago, Wood was in Calcutta, serving the poor with Mother Teresa. Before that, she was a Jesuit Volunteer in Yakima, learning about mental health issues for those on the margins of society. As a counselor, she knows that untreated depression can paralyze a person. She thinks that the global climate crisis is so daunting that society disconnects from it and cannot even get started. So in one of her chapters, she proposes a kind of sacred grief work so that action can begin.

Environmentalists can sometimes make the mistake of offering fact upon fact. That shuts down the psyche, says Wood, who knows people need to grieve the problem and then find a concrete way to help. For example, some local groups including University of Portland students have helped restore a local watershed with native shrubs. That can cool water temperatures and eventually mitigate warming.

In her retreat work, Wood has found that people take on such great tasks better in a community than alone.

But even some social justice Catholics are wary of making climate change a focus. Surely, they say, we are called to serve the poor. The book points out that addressing global warming is also helping the poor, who stand to suffer first and most in the man-made climate shift.

Meanwhile, some Catho-

"Imagine if someone had gone to Terri Schiavo and injected poison into her feeding system. People would have gone crazy. But that's what we are doing to ourselves."

— Catholic author Pam Wood on the ecological crisis

lics see environmentalism as off-focus, a preferring of nature to humans. Wood argues the two cannot really be separated and that ecology is at its roots an enterprise about the dignity of life.

"Imagine if someone had gone to Terri Schiavo and injected poison into her feeding system. People would have gone crazy. But that's what we are doing to ourselves," she says.

Global climate change and other environmental problems have touched — at the highest levels — the church's belief about the sanctity of creation.

Pope Benedict has pointed out the need for a "capacity to assess and forecast, to monitor the dynamics of environmental change and sustainable growth, and to draw up and apply solutions at an international level." He also noted that "particular attention must be paid to the fact that the poorest countries are likely to pay the heaviest price for ecological deterioration."

In one chapter, Wood highlights the idea of ecological sin and gives a new twist to an ancient Christian prayer practice — examination of conscience.

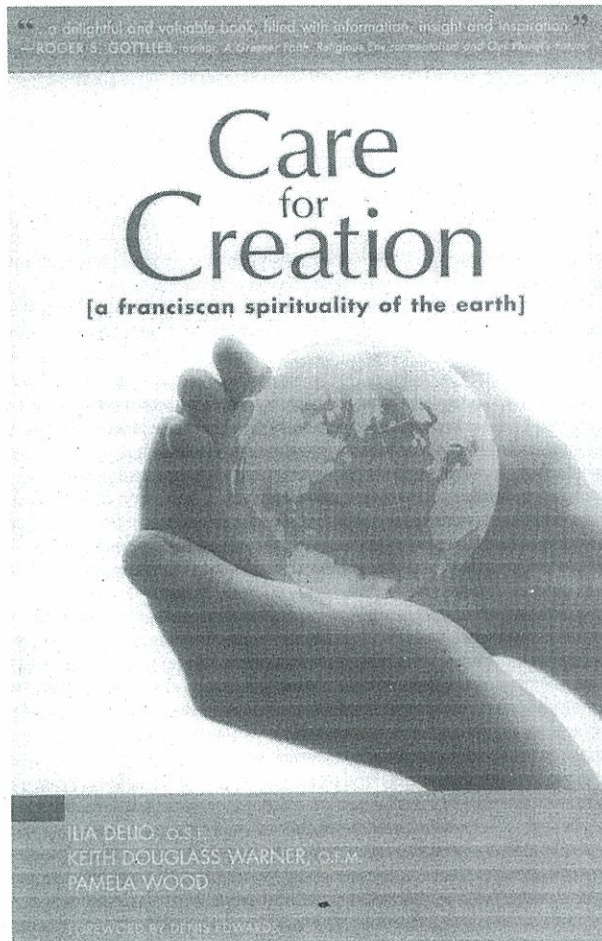
"Is my whole life centered on God's overflowing love?" she asks. "Have I lived in a state of unrelatedness, over and against creation? Do I seek to eliminate from the world whatever keeps all creatures from their fullest development intended by their Creator: pollution, greed, overconsumption, loss of habitat, disease, war, ex-

inction of species, oppressive laws and structures?"

The book also offers some challenges about purchasing, commuting and even eating. Wood herself tried to eat nothing but locally-grown food during Lent. She found it difficult, even with the aid of the spiritual context.

But that commitment, and curtailing overall consumption and driving, makes for a more fulfilling life than is typical, she says. That notion, which it appears people are beginning to discover, gives her great hope.

This summer, she will lead a workshop on the ideas presented in the book. Set for June 20-22, the weekend will be held at Nestucca, the Jesuit retreat site and wildlife sanctuary on the Oregon coast. She also plans to offer the retreat to parishes that ask. It can be anything from three hours to an entire weekend and would cost little or



nothing. For more information about the book or retreats, send email to pamarama2@yahoo.com or call (503) 708-9751.

Helping churches save energy, money

HOOD RIVER — Two upcoming workshops here will help churches, synagogues, mosques and individuals save energy and money.

The sessions are sponsored by Oregon Interfaith Power and Light, a project of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and co-sponsored by Oregon Department of Energy and Energy Trust of Oregon.

Geared to the needs of faith congregations, a consultation set for noon to 2:30 p.m. Thursday, May 29, will cover low-cost and no-cost measures to save energy expenses, energy ethics and funding energy efficiency projects for religious facilities.

From 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. the same day, another workshop will explore household energy efficiency, incentives and financing for efficiency and renewable energy projects, the ethics of energy stewardship, and renewable energy options that are clean and affordable.

To register, call (503) 221-1054, ext. 201, or e-mail ksharinghouses@emoregon.org by Tuesday, May 27.

Keynote speaker for the workshops will be Doug Boleyn, past-president of the Solar Oregon and president of Cascade Solar Consulting.

Location is Hood River Valley Christian Church, 975 Indian Valley Rd.