

I am truly honored and blessed to share my experiences of sustainability on the student panel this afternoon. I would like to thank you for coming and the Creighton Honors Program for supporting my trip here this weekend.

Three years ago I attended a lecture and discussion about whether climate change was a fabrication or legitimate science. We now have a formal recycling program on campus. Creighton has also formed faculty and student sustainability organizations, created a sustainability coordinator position, and faculty have developed at least a dozen courses focused on sustainability. The Creighton Center for Service and Justice has made sustainability one of its core justice priorities and it has developed several spring and fall break weeklong service trips with a focus on sustainability and its impact on poor communities, peace building, and human society. Within the next months, Creighton will have installed three different types of solar panels and by early next year we will have four wind turbines constructed on campus.

These monumental changes are not exclusive to Creighton, as there have been comparable trends made at other colleges. Outside of the University setting, significant legislation pertaining to climate change and renewable energy has been introduced in Congress, the global community is gathering in Copenhagen later this year to address climate change, and Pope Benedict's most recent encyclical specifically addressed Catholicism's call to care for creation.

This afternoon, I will share how my personal experiences of sustainability in service, in the classroom, on Capitol Hill in Washington, and on campus have been motivated by my faith in the context of all of these sustainable initiatives at Creighton and around the world.

The primary area where my faith has motivated environmental action is through service. This past March, I was given the opportunity to co-lead a week-long Spring Break Service trip to a sustainable farm in Lincoln, NE. I have a great affection for food, its power to unite, to encourage conversation, and promote love of friend and neighbor. I find God in what I am eating and the people with whom I am sharing that meal. I was given the chance to participate in a week of service centered on food. The table was set, literally, for transformative week.

The Loth family owns Shadowbrook, a sustainable farm located on the fringe of Lincoln, NE. They graciously opened their home (and kitchen) to eight Creighton students for a week of service. They taught us how to milk goats, dig holes for fence posts, and plant seeds in a greenhouse. In addition to these skills, the Loth

family introduced us to their local food community. There was a friend that makes cheese from cows that live on a completely sustainable farm; their neighbor that has developed a cyclical process for raising chickens, cattle, and vegetables despite the economic challenges of doing it without pesticides or hormones; and a business partner that owns a vegetarian café and buys nearly all of her produce from farmers in the state of Nebraska, once again, in spite of the challenges of cost and Nebraska climate. Through immersion into the local food community and an introduction to sustainable agriculture, we learned the importance of asking (and knowing) from where, from whom, and in what way is our food grown.

Food and the imagery of meals abound in our faith. It is a crucial element to the analogy of every person being treated as individuals and coming to the table. Jesus' spent his last evening sharing a meal with his closest friends. This is the same meal that we recreate every time we celebrate the Eucharist – the fundamental act of our faith.

Spending a week at Shadowbrook Farm taught me that eating is not a morally neutral act. Because food is such an important element in my life, in my faith, in my interaction with my family and friends – it is important to know what the ethical implications are involved in eating food. The environmental impacts of food can contribute to climate change, affect species health, and degrade cropland – all considerations that may impede or disturb our personal call from Jesus to feed the hungry and treat the poor as if they were the Daughters and Sons of God.

After leaving Shadowbrook Farm, despite the education that it provided me, I was left with a feeling of incompleteness about what I could do for the environment. Even though my week at Shadowbrook prompted me to make frequent visits to the farmer's market and to intentionally buy seasonal and local foods, I felt as if these were unsatisfactorily achieving Catholicism's call to live a sustainable life.

It was this feeling of incompleteness that encouraged me to apply through the Creighton Center for Service and Justice to work with NETWORK, a National Catholic social justice lobby in Washington, DC, for ten weeks throughout the summer. I sought out the opportunity to work on federal environmental policy with NETWORK because I felt that my individual actions of diligently turning of my apartment's lights and buying local food would not halt environmental degradation. While I understood that these were necessary to conserve energy and cut pesticide use, they were not enough to save God's beautiful creation.

The opportunity to participate in the formation of national policy was a way to expand the extent to which my actions could protect endangered species, mitigate climate change, promote local and sustainable agriculture, and encourage the use of renewable energy. I saw this as an opportunity to respond to Catholicism's call to stewardship.

This optimism and faith that I brought to Washington was quickly challenged as I began to see the negative connotations that were given to environmental policy. It was immensely frustrating to witness some legislators and lobbyists approach the environment as a policy area of convenience to further economic and business needs, not as an essential, necessary aspect to our existence on earth. Our faith, through scripture and the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, says that we are to prioritize care for the poor, an individual's spiritual and material development, and stewardship of the environment. I saw the protection and preservation of the global environment as an opportunity to fulfill my faith's call to ensure the poor of our country and our world are not sacrificed as humanity moves closer to climate destruction. However, the simplicity of this approach was quickly challenged by the idea that the interests of the poor, workers, the economy, and the environment are mutually exclusive.

It was important for me that my confrontations with the difficulties of making environmental policy were comforted by the community of NETWORK and the Catholic faith that motivates me. Without this community or my faith, the realities of forming policy would have discouraged me from continuing to work for a more just relationship with the environment.

In bringing my experiences, clarified idealism, and an appreciation of Catholic community back to Creighton this semester, I undertook a new sustainable endeavor – working in the Center for Service and Justice doing legislative advocacy. Our group is an embryonic form of NETWORK that exists for the members of the Creighton Community. However, unlike NETWORK, where their members are already interested in the progress of justice in policy making, Creighton students – like all students – are perpetually studying, involved in numerous organizations, and are generously giving their time and attention to others through service. In addition to these crucial elements of education, how do I convince other students of the importance of environmental legislation? It is an immense challenge. It is hard to convey the reality of environmental degradation when passing next week's

test, or completing so many service hours, or meeting with the three clubs, appear to be more urgent than the daunting goal of curbing climate change.

Motivating me can also be also be challenging. When policies protecting the environment are brush aside as “not pragmatic” or “impractical,” I question my own efforts – are they enough, do *I* have the additional time to sacrifice, will my work even make a difference, am I passionate enough about sustainability and caring for creation? When my classmates, who have a lessened desire to change policy, are confronted with the decision of whether to dedicate a few hours making phone calls or to studying, I am not surprised that they choose the latter. However, it remains a frustration for me to present the grand implications of *not* convincing our congresspersons *that* clean energy is important, subsidizing large farms hurts families like the Loths at Shadowbrook, and harmful pollutants are killing off species at an intense rate, while also combating the realities of college life and time commitments.

In the academic realm of my university experience, the sustainability courses I have taken provided me with an integral foundation for my experiences. These classes have been from the departments of theology, chemistry, philosophy, sociology, and political science. Instructors created these courses informed by their interests and the need to emphasize the importance that their discipline can and should play in creating a culture and understanding of sustainability. Witnessing faculty share their passion for the environment from different perspectives has been crucial to my factual, emotional, and theological development and it has also empowered to me work for a more just and sustainable world. Recently for example, in a theology course called “God is Green,” Dr. John O’Keefe declared the environment as *the* challenge of our generation. If we were to succeed in guaranteeing its protection, we would solidify our position with other “great” generations. However, if we fail, the number of future generations may be limited.

The interdisciplinary nature of these class offerings has assisted me in developing a dynamic and applicable understanding of the environment. One of the most impactful classes on my approach to global sustainability was not intended to be one directly pertaining to the environment. Nevertheless, in the course simply titled Catholic Social Teaching, I grew in my awareness of Catholicism’s call to care for the environment. The reading, discussion, and analysis of encyclicals and pastoral letters crafted my understanding of how the state of the environment can help or inhibit the development of people. When climate change disrupts crops and the

growers are unable to eat, these farmers are denied their full humanity. With an increased vulnerability to disease, the poor are denied their full humanity. When the local water source dries up and children become chronically dehydrated, they are denied their full humanity. These are examples of taking for ourselves what God has given to all. In *The Development of Peoples*, Pope Paul VI says that “the world is made to furnish each individual with the means of livelihood and the instruments for growth and progress, all people have therefore, the right to find in the world what is necessary for them.” It is from this call to ensure that every person has access to and receives their created gifts from God, that my faith calls me to work for the care of the environment.

My classes, internship, organizing, and service have led me to see an ultimate goal of pursuing a sustainable human existence – peace. John Paul II says in his encyclical, *On Human Work*, that the work of justice “will fill the world with the spirit of Christ, the spirit of justice, charity, and peace.” It is in this last objective, peace, that I see the fulfillment of my passion for the environment. Peace with the environment will lead to peace with other humans. If you want peace, heal the environment. St. Francis of Assisi – whose feast day we celebrated this past Sunday – said that, “if you have people who will exclude any of God’s creation from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have people who will deal likewise with their fellow humans.” Ultimately, this is why I buy local food and insist that my roommates and my family turn off their lights and recycle. This is why I work for legislation that will protect creation. It is why I try to organize and motivate other students. I do all of these with the hope, the faith, and the belief that a sustainable relationship with the earth will inherently yield a world of peace.

My experiences have both informed and been informed by my faith. It is because of my faith in God creating the world and that we are to be stewards of it, that have led me to work for a more just relationship with the environment. It is a faith-filled care for the environment that we will ultimately bring about peace on our earth. How can we build peace when climate change disrupts water sources, makes land infertile, and encourages disease? Without passionate work for the preservation of our environment, violence will continue and peace will be rendered impossible. However, with concrete actions toward caring for the environment, we, as Catholics, can fulfill our call to “let the kingdom come,” to serve the poor, and to bring peace to our beautiful, created world.