

Betsy Hardy, of Richmond, is the Coordinator for Vermont Interfaith Power and Light. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Franklin Pierce College (now University) in Rindge, N.H., and master's degree from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., with a major in science and environmental education.

Why did you agree to serve on this committee?

I am delighted to serve on this committee. I've been hoping for some time that the Diocese of Burlington would get more involved in caring for earth.

What specific concerns do you have about the wellbeing of the earth, "our common home?"

I have many concerns about the wellbeing of the earth, "our common home." My primary concern, however, is global climate change, which leads to many other environmental problems. These environmental problems connect to other serious issues that humanity faces (e.g. drought that leads to famine, loss of income and sometimes loss of home and livelihood, etc.). Environmental problems are also causing the decrease in numbers (and sometimes extinction) of many other species. In Vermont, global climate change is having an effect on our lakes and rivers (warming the water which is part of the cause of increased algae blooms, etc.), and on various activities that we think of as central to life in Vermont such as maple sugaring, winter sports and agriculture.

What message do you want to convey about care of the earth?

The message I want to convey about caring for earth is how important it is for us to take concerted action to address global climate change now! Scientists have been telling us for decades that global climate change is a very serious problem and we need to take quick action to address it. Climate scientists have been speaking out and saying that we're getting close to the point where it will be too late to turn global climate change around. When the polar ice sheets are significantly melting (which they already are), it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse the trend. I have hope that our country will soon decide to switch to clean energy and stop burning fossil fuels. I believe it is fundamentally a spiritual problem. If we really believe that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it," and that our role is "to till and keep" the garden—God's Creation—then we should be doing all we can to care for, not exploit and destroy, the world.

How can Vermont Catholics participate in the care of the earth?

A good start is to make our homes, churches and other buildings energy efficient so we aren't wasting energy. Transportation is another important area where there are many opportunities to make changes: driving fuel-efficient cars, car pooling, walking and biking more, using public transportation when possible, flying less, etc. We need to be encouraging our lawmakers to pass energy policies and legislation that will help address global climate change.

What do you say to people who do not understand/believe the seriousness of the situation of the earth?

I know that many people are doubtful about global climate change and other serious environmental problems because much false information has been deliberately spread to confuse the public. Some people are so set in their thinking that it's probably not possible to change their minds, but many are at least somewhat open to hearing facts and the truth about what scientists are finding. For Catholics,

since the sanctity of life is so central, I hope they will come to see that global climate change is threatening all life on Earth, and thus is something we really need to focus on and seriously address as soon as possible. You don't have to be rich to make changes. And, there are programs that offer financial incentives.

What motivates you in your work to protect our earth?

My primary motivation in working to protect the earth is love of God and love of God's creation.