

Father Thomas R. Houle, a Capuchin Franciscan belonging to the New York-New England Province of St. Mary, is Pastor of St. Peter Church in Rutland and St. Alphonsus Church in Pittsford. He had 20 years of Catholic education -- from first grade through high school and college. He earned a master of divinity degree from Maryknoll School of Theology (Seminary) in Maryknoll, N.Y.

Why did you agree to serve on this committee?

One of the reasons for my being on this committee is due to the fact that St. Peter's became the first parish in the Diocese of Burlington to install solar panels—in March of 2016. As a Franciscan, this seemed to be the "right" thing to do in protecting our earth as well as for the benefit and protection of the children of the future. I agreed to serve on this committee in hopes to be able to offer to a wider audience the hopes and observations of Pope Francis as laid out in "Laudato Si'" and by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

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

I believe that we all have a responsibility and should be concerned about the wellbeing of the earth, considered to be "our common home." St. Francis of Assisi stressed the fact that Mother Earth was given to us by God. As a result, to respect it and protect it has become an obligation for us. If we as individuals, and then as communities, do not take an interest in this, then what will become of "our home?" For many of us, the whole idea of the "Care of Creation" is somewhat of a new concept, but doesn't it all boil down to becoming more aware of our very identity as human beings and our relationships to one another as is related in the "Canticle of Creatures?"

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

Learning how climate change is impacting our common home and how we can actively respond are important concerns of our times.

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

Vermont is known as the "Green State." How beautiful the four seasons are in this wonderful state; what are we doing to keep it "green?" How are we caring for it, especially as a gift from God? If each one of us reading this can pause for a few moments to ask ourselves such questions as, how much do I take for granted regarding how I treat and care about "Mother Earth?" How much of an interest do I take in this topic, or do I have a sense that this is something for someone else to do?

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

There is a need to refocus our attention and to learn anew what our earth is all about and how we can be more concerned about the earth. The fact that a "Year of Creation" has been established indicates that this is most important.

What motivates you in your work to protect our earth?

What motivates me, and hopefully others, is to take the time to pause, to reflect, to pray and to act on this topic so that we can be the true stewards of the blessed earth that has been given to us by God.