

# Loving God's Creation Means Taking Care of It: New Ministry Focuses on the Environment

BY MARY DONOVAN,

Green, that's the color for Matt Beaton and Bob Clark-Phelps - green meaning respect for the environment we live in; green meaning not wasting, not spoiling; green meaning Eco-Justice

Matt and Bob head up the new Eco-Justice ministry which falls under the umbrella of the Social Justice Ministry. Their overall mission, according to Matt is to understand the world we live in and the gift we've been given, to protect it and to reflect that notion in spirituality.

"A lot of what we do is going to be education content," he said. "Getting people to look beyond, 'what the heck do I care?'"

Matt and Bob are no newcomers to this concept.

"Both of us have professions that motivate us in the same way," said Bob, "to be aware of God's creation and the necessity of caring for it."

So what are their professions? Matt, who is a graduate of St. Mary's, St. John's, WPI and BU started working as an environmental engineer, he said. He did a lot of sustainability consulting which in plain English means keeping businesses from wasting energy. Then five years ago he went back to doing construction. His field is green building with a residential application.

Happily for him, the push for green homes is reflected in his growing business, he said.

"The demand is growing fast," he said. And, to do his part, Matt and his wife, Laura, are building an all green house for themselves.

Bob Clark-Phelps has been interested in this sort of thing since Boy Scouts, he said. He was so interested that he pursued his passion to a PhD in physics. Once he achieved this, his determination was to use it and apply it to something that has social value. He chose the field of solar cells.

He worked on solar energy for four years, three and a half at Evergreen Energy. Currently he is involved in working on equipment to make computer chips. However, he said, his goal is to get back into working with solar cells.

"There's no impact on the environment," he said.

Bob is very concerned about global warming.

"We're coming to a crisis," he said. "We need to make changes in conservation."

Saving energy is possible and it doesn't cost anything, he said. Our current conserva-

tion efforts are inadequate and they will become even less effective. What little we are doing will be offset by the fact that many people around the world are trying to raise their standard of living, he said.

The idea for the Eco-Justice ministry surfaced in early summer. Bob Shine, a student at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., sent his idea for just such a ministry to Joan Fouhy and Evan Page, co-chairs of the Social Justice Ministry. Bob, a leader of young people when he was a teenager at St. Mary's, put the challenge to adults. Do something about the environment.

His proposal listed several steps, most of them dealing with education. He strongly emphasized the concept of the earth as God's gift to his people. Joan and Evan called a meeting on June 29 and encouraged interested people to come. Twenty-five people came to that meeting, according to Joan.

Bob Clark-Phelps and Matt Beaton were there.

"I was thinking about what the church teaches us relating to the earth and the universe," Bob said. "I wanted to do something. A neighbor saw the notice and said here's something you'd be interested in."

And he was. It has been a very rewarding experience for him, he said

"I've always looked for other people who are concerned about the environment," he said, "people who know that it's our responsibility to care for it."

The Eco-Justice ministry is just at the outset, said Matt. New members are always welcome. So far they have pushed recycling. They have encouraged kids in school to bring water in reusable bottles instead of plastic throwaways. They hope to be involved with some of the parish development as the renewal goes forward. They are studying how our energy is best spent.

They are trying to have an Eco-Justice, energy-saving, environment-friendly tip in the bulletin every week. Educating people to the possibilities of conservation and the concerns of global warming is a big job. But it's a first step toward an even more massive task - saving the planet.

The realization of all the work to be done motivates him, said Bob Clark-Phelps.

"It pushes me to work on Eco-Justice," he said.

As their information gets about and more and more people understand the message, he is confident that others will join.

## Social Justice Offers Many Ministries

"Sounds of the Season" - Holiday Benefit Concert - Friday, December 11. Enjoy an evening of beautiful music while helping those in need at home and around the world.

**Haiti.** Since 1994 St. Mary's has extended a helping hand to St. Michel's Parish in Roche-a-Bateau, Haiti. Through our twinning partnership we provide \$800 a month in support to this very large parish in the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

**Eco-Justice Ministry.** This new ministry aims to help us to become good stewards of the earth's resources through enjoyable and educational activities.

**Local Harvest Brunch.** This event supports local farmers—and also reduces the environmental impact of shipping produce, meat, and other food across great distances.

**Dismas House.** Parishioners share meals and conversation with former prisoners working to make a fresh start in life.

**Heifer Project International.** During December we'll have an opportunity to give an 'alternative gift' of an animal to help farmers and communities in developing countries.

**Furniture Drive. Walk for the Homeless.** Both of these events help people who are struggling with homelessness, the aftermath of fires, or other difficult situations.

**Item of the Month.** The goal is to collect 200 of each month's "Item" to add to the bags distributed through St. Anne's Food Pantry. Volunteers also help prepare the bags.

**Share the Bounty.** Parishioners share produce from their gardens or farm stands with those who must rely on food pantries.

**Community Home Repair Program.** People who are handy are invited to work with the Senior Center and local churches to help with simple repairs and home maintenance.

**Global Solidarity Mass.** Prayer Vigil for Peace. These events bring people together to pray for peace and justice.

**Fair Trade.** Sales of fair trade coffee and other goods help producers around the world.

**Family social justice.** Events provide opportunities for families to explore justice issues.

**Sri Lanka.** After the tsunami, parishioners donated over \$14,000 which helped rebuild 40 houses in Sri Lanka. In January 2010, Evan and Marti Page will revisit Sri Lanka.

## Merton Group Offers Season of Thoughtful Discussion

BY JOHN COLLINS,

For the past eight years a small group of Thomas Merton enthusiasts and readers have met at St. Mary's Pastoral Center to read and discuss books by Thomas Merton. In the beginning the group met in the evening but for the past six years the meetings have been during the day. The group has read and discussed Merton's New Seeds of Contemplation which explored the contemplative pathways to one's deep spiritual center. During the 2005-2006 year the group discussed Peace in the Post-Christian Era, a treatise on the issues of war and the nuclear threat during the 1960's which, of course, resonates with us in today's world. For the 2006-2007 year the group read and discussed Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master edited by Lawrence Cunningham (ISBN # 0-8091-3314-8, paperback). This book is an anthology of the many Thomas Merton writings, primarily about spirituality. For the 2007-2008 year the group continued with the book, Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master.

The Merton group read the text, Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master at their first meeting for the 2008-2009 year. The text for the Thomas Merton Study Group during the 2008-2009 was The Seven Storey Mountain authored by Thomas Merton —Introduction by Robert Giroux—The Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (1998)-ISBN 0-15-601086-0 —paperback. Since some members of the group have



Terry Bacharz, Dr. John Collins and Ann O'Connor at the Thomas Merton table at the Oct. 25 Ministry Fair. Terry made the poster.

read the book many years ago the focus was new insights gained by the readings—in a sense it was The Seven Storey Mountain revisited.

During the 2009-2010 year the Merton Group is reading Mystics and Zen Masters by Thomas Merton. It is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2000. Library of Congress catalogue card number is: 66-20167. At the first meeting in September the group finished commenting on the last three essays in the book, Thomas Merton, Spiritual Masters edited by Lawrence Cunningham. Also at the first meeting the Group began commenting on Chapter 1 of Mystics and Zen

Masters. The Merton Group will meet on the second Tuesday of the month at St. Mary's Pastoral Center. Time is 9:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M. Everyone is welcome to join the group including people of other faiths and other parishes.

2009: September 8, October 13, November 10  
2010: January 12, February 9, March 9, April 13, May 11

Questions about the Merton Group can be directed to John Collins: for further information. Telephone-508-753-6203.

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Merton scholar, Dr. John Collins is moderator of The Merton Group

## Longtime Merton Fan Warmly Recommends the Group

BY JOHN CONCORDIA

Why am I in the group?

While it is likely that each person has a different personal reason for being in the study group my initial exposure to Thomas Merton goes back about 50 years when I was confined to a hospital room in isolation for three weeks with an unknown virus. I received a copy of his first book, The Seven Storey Mountain, his most popular autobiography which he wrote in 1948 while living in a Trappist monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky. I read it from cover to cover, just overwhelmed by the wide range of life experiences of one man, obviously very intelligent, knowledgeable, practical, and dedicated, to seek the truth.

His travels covered the world from Australia to Europe and the U.S. He tried many life styles along the way, too! Reading several of his later books—Seeds of Celebration, Seeds Of Contemplation, Seeds of Destruction—re-enforced my sense of awe at the extent of his understanding of the com-

plex nature of the world's problems and the likely consequences of the country's approach to their solutions. Many consider him a prophet of the 20th century. Fr.Leo provided an additional impetus by giving me a compendium of Merton's essential writings by Fr. Cunningham at Notre Dame in which Merton is described as a "Spiritual Master."

Later I was invited by Dr. Collins to a discussion group in The Boston area where I learned of the international scope of interest in Thomas Merton. As a result I now have a continuing interest in knowing more about him because even now, some 40 years after his untimely death in Asia, his work is still being exposed to us. People like Dr. Collins have searched the archives for letters, essays, and other written materials; in particular Merton's views on War and Peace offer many valuable insights into the current global happenings which affect our relationships with different religious traditions. I hope to continue learning within the St. Mary's circle.

What does the group offer?

The group offers each one an opportunity to explore within a friendly environment including people of varying backgrounds with a common interest in learning what it means to "be human." We have a small group of men and women from the central Mass. area: Frequently attending is Fr. John O'Brien C.P. who has provided many bible study classes at our parish. In the process of discussing some of Thomas Merton's thinking from a spiritual perspective many practical answers can be found to your questions. We talk, we listen, we agree, we disagree. Everyone has an opportunity to contribute a little or a lot as you wish. Questions of any sort will find an answer usually by Dr. Collins however this always requires additional reading of another Merton book or poem!

You are welcome to join in.

P.S. Even if you cannot join the group I recommend you read The Seven Storey Mountain sometime in your life!