

Ten Action Steps for Individuals and Families Responding to the Current Global Crises of Energy, Environment, and Economy, Discovering Active Hope

Earth Day, April 22, 2013, Mary Ann C. Holtz, St. Petersburg, FL

When we face difficult times and painful events, whether at the personal, family, local or global community levels, one of our common challenges relates to the question of hope. Most of us have learned to think of hope as optimism, hoping for “good outcomes”. Yet often our challenges do not seem likely to be resolved in the way we would really like, and then we are tempted to close off through denial, blaming others, or waiting for a rescue; or to try to escape through busyness and addictive behaviors; or to sink into discouragement, hopelessness, even despair.

The times in which we live are presenting all of us with challenges that seem not to have easy or even realistic possibilities for “good outcomes”. In addition to the difficulties all humans experience at times (relationship tensions, deaths, illnesses, economic stresses, addictions, anxiety and depression, loss of meaning, religious or faith crises, etc.) we are now also becoming more aware of the interlocking global crises related to energy (e.g. rising fuel costs, increasingly destructive extraction methods like deep drilling in the Gulf of Mexico and the BP oil spill, mountain top removal, and fracking), environment (e.g. global climate change triggering more severe weather events, flooding of coastal cities, etc.), and economy (e.g. huge debt loads, mounting health care costs, losses of homes and jobs).

As I have engaged in extensive study, prayer, reflection, group gatherings and action in the last 6-7 years related to the converging global crises, I have been grateful for resources which help me to cultivate a different kind of hope. One book defines this as “Active Hope”.

“Active Hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for. Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do rather than have. It is a process we can apply to any situation, and it involves three key steps. First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we'd like things to move in or the values we'd like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction.”, page 3, **Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy** by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, 2012.

It is likely that each one reading this is already engaged in work which is valuable, whether that work is in healing bodies, souls and/or relationships, nurturing families, easing poverty and other suffering, bringing non-violent respect for life to violent situations, etc., along with tending to the basic needs of ourselves and our families. I have come to believe that, while we certainly can't drop those endeavors, we must allow a growing awareness of these global crises to deeply influence how we do all our other work. It is all connected. We are all connected.

I have updated this 10 Action Steps hand-out (which I first developed for a Caring for God's Creation conference in April 2008), to offer some very practical steps each of us can take that will help us live Active Hope. This transformative action, empowered by the Source of Love, in my experience is the best antidote to denial, escapism, and despair. May this resource support you in your practice of Active Hope!

Action Steps

As you read this resource, take time to celebrate the steps you are already engaged in. Then choose the next one or two which you will add in this week and month, beginning with items from Steps 1 & 2. Note a monthly review time in your appointment book.

1) Connecting to the Source of Love; Creating Plan for Healthy Self-Care and Stress Protection

To access and sustain the spiritual, emotional, and physical energy we require in order to be able to contribute our part in the transition to a life-sustaining society, we need both spiritual practices and healthy self-care.

a) Daily prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading and study: whatever spiritual practices help you to be rooted in Divine Love, in connection, in compassion and in hope, and help you open to Divine guidance. Here are some sites and resources I find helpful:

- A Network for Grateful Living: Interfaith, many resources to help root us in gratefulness : <http://www.gratefulness.org/> “Grateful living is a universal ethic capable of ushering us peacefully into a new era in which we must share the world's resources fairly and conserve the environment for future generations.”
http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/global_ethic.htm
- A helpful book offering guidance in meditation and prayer: *The Awakened Heart*, by Gerald May. Also his book, *The Wisdom of Wilderness: Experiencing the Healing Power of Nature*. www.shalem.org
- Sacred Space: daily on-line prayer guide using Judeo-Christian Scripture readings: <http://www.sacredspace.ie/> . For those who prefer audio, <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>
- Centering Prayer: method of prayer which helps form us in contemplative prayer and living: <http://www.centeringprayer.com/>

List the spiritual practice which helps to root you in Love and/or which of the resources above you will explore in the coming week:

b) Healthy Self-Care and Stress Protection Plan

1) Using my 2 Counseling Ministry web-columns, “Living Well with Multiple Stressors” and “Moving from Stress to Relaxation”, assess your current plan and then add to it as needed.

2) Also, read my web-column “The Healing Practice of Thanksgiving”, especially because “*When tackling issues such as climate change, the stance of gratitude is a refreshing alternative to guilt or fear as a source of motivation.*”, page 56, **Active Hope**.

All three columns can be accessed through:

<http://www.stpaulstpete.com/index.php/ministries/counseling>

2) Get outdoors and open up to the revelation of Love through all of creation. Experience our physical connection to the Earth community.

a) individuals: Walk, garden, sit and breathe, etc. **List your favorites:**

b) couples/families: Our families are increasingly being pulled into isolated cells by

technologies such as video games, cell phones, PCs and iPods. We are living in terribly fast-paced ways, flooded often with stress chemicals. This lifestyle sets us up for more irritability, unresolved conflict, loss of connection with each other and the Earth. Make time with your spouse and with other family members to take walks or ride bikes, to go on picnics at the park or beach, to go to nature preserves for guided hikes, garden, etc.

List one family outdoor activity you will enjoy within the next couple of weeks:

3) Consume less (Reduce) and Share more: Our economy, based as it is on unbridled growth and production, is driving us to destroy the very life-systems of Earth upon which we are dependent for survival. Our "conspicuous consumption" and accumulation of stuff leads us to live over-worked, over-stressed, unhealthy lifestyles. Directly linked to our excesses is the devastating poverty and hunger of half of the people on our earth. (1 billion living on less than \$1 a day, another 2 billion living on less than \$2 dollars a day!!!).

For a great magazine article for Scripture study to support your action to consume less and share more: "Pay Attention to the Birds: A Bible Study on Luke 12, ecology, and economics" by Ched Myers In *Sojourners* magazine, December 2009. That same issue of *Sojourners* includes several other good articles about environmental concerns. <http://sojo.net/magazine/2009/12/pay-attention-birds> If this link doesn't work, go to <http://sojo.net/> and search for Dec 2009 issue.

A) Consume Less:

1) a) individuals: Use the handy tips for beating "Affluenza":

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/treat/tips.html> . **List one item you are planning to purchase soon:**

Answer the questions from Affluenza Tip #1:

b) families: For one of your family nights, gather around the computer and watch and discuss: "The Story of Stuff with Annie Leonard" is an engaging new short film that explains the "materials economy" in 20 fun-filled minutes. <http://www.storyofstuff.com/> Their project includes several other short animated films on specific aspects to empower our transition to a life-sustaining society.

List other ways to involve your family in learning to consume less:

2) When you do decide to make a purchase, look for Fair Trade and green products.

a) <http://www.greenpages.org/> : "Green America's directory of Products and Services for People and the Planet". Also, many local communities are beginning to offer "shop local" campaigns to support local businesses that are committed to practices that support the common good.

b) <http://www.serrv.org/> Fair Trade (chocolate, tea, coffee, gifts, clothing). Consider an **alternative** gift from <https://www.alternativegifts.org/> : "A nontraditional way of giving. Rather than buying yet one more necktie for Uncle George, honor him instead by giving in his name a life-sustaining gift to help abolish global poverty or to renew our planet's environment."

What gift are you planning to buy soon? Make a note of which of these resources you will use to shop for this gift:

B) For services, consider Time Banking. “Tampa Bay Time is a community skills exchange, also known as a “time bank.” Time banking is a way to exchange services as an alternative to the cash economy.” <http://tampabaytime.org/>

C) Share more: If you don't already have groups whose work you believe in and with whom you regularly share, check out Charity Navigator. Don't let that old excuse "but how do we know the money is used wisely?" stop you from sharing your excess with those who don't have enough to feed their kids today!!! <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm> My favorite group is www.BeyondBorders.net, with whom Walt and I and others from our parish visited in Haiti in 1999. “Helping people build movements for liberation in Haiti.” Check them out via Charity Navigator site and notice they continue to receive the highest rating possible.

4) Recycle and Reuse: (remember “There is no **away**, when we throw away.”)

a) Recycling: Pinellas county A to Z guide: <http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/getridofit/> and <http://pinellascounty.org/utilities/kids/> (Lots of great resources to involve kids in caring for creation.) If you live outside Pinellas county, check with your local government.

As part of recycling, **close the loop** by purchasing products made with recycled materials, for example toilet paper made from recycled paper.

b) Reuse: ask your grandparents for ideas. Also, see <http://www.freecycle.org/> through which you, your business or group can give away your excess goods to others who can use them and/or you can make a request for wanted items.

List items which you already reuse or recycle and what purchase you will shift in order to “close the loop”.

What items did you see your elder family members reusing which you now throw away?

What do you regularly throw in the trash which you will now look for ways to recycle/reuse?

5) Food choices:

a) One area for action which recurs in nearly every resource I have studied involves the impact of our food choices. **The first recommended action here is to step-by-step move toward a plant-based diet, away from animal products marketed by the industrial food system.**

The **Vegetarian Resource Group** (<http://www.vrg.org>) offers lots of **guidance from Registered Dieticians** and some **great recipes** and easy ways to begin to switch your diet away from animal products. For articles about the connection between diet choices and climate change: <http://www.vrg.org/links/#EnviroInfo>).

For a guide to sustainable food choices, with articles from both a sustainable farmer who raises animals and a vegan as well as some info on how our eating behaviors affect world hunger: http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/can-animals-save-us?ica=Link_txt_Magazine&icl=TopNav_100 (if link doesn't work, go to <http://www.yesmagazine.org/> Spring 2011 issue)

b) Another recurring recommendation in many of the sources I have been studying is to buy

organic whenever possible, looking for **locally grown organic foods** where available. Some sources for locally grown organic foods are Community-supported Agriculture <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>, farmer's markets, and <http://locallygrown.net/> (In St Petersburg: <http://stpete.locallygrown.net/market> "Chemical-Free Urban Farmers Making a Difference").

c) Start growing some of your own food. Cooperative Extension Service gardening classes are a good place to start <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/>, with offices all over Florida. They offer resources for other aspects of sustainable living, also.

In Tampa Bay, find permaculture teachers and Gaia's Guardians group and resources in the Tampa Bay, Florida area through <http://www.gaiasguardians.info/>, <http://www.meetup.com/The-St-Petersburg-Permaculture-Guild/>. Get hands-on experience by volunteering with Gaia's Guardians at Faith House Garden or by volunteering with the Edible Peace Patch Project school gardens (<http://www.peacepatch.org/>).

List one of your favorite meatless meals:

What is one food item which you buy weekly and you will now aim to buy locally/organically grown? Which vegetable will you learn to grow?

Circle which of the food articles above which you will read in next week.

6) Transportation:

a) **Drive less; walk/bike/bus and carpool more.** Plan errands so that you drive the fewest miles possible. When driving around town, turn off the AC and roll down the windows; when driving highway speeds it is actually more fuel-saving to close windows and use AC. Give up pleasure rides, take pleasure walks instead! Have **regular maintenance** done (e.g. air filter checks, tire pressure optimal, etc.) so that your vehicle burns the least fossil-fuels possible. When you are choosing a replacement vehicle, purchase a hybrid, a plug-in electric, or an extremely fuel efficient car.

b) **If you travel by air**, weigh the impact on energy and climate against your reasons for this travel method. If you choose air, then commit to using step c).

c) **Purchase carbon offsets for your fossil fuel emissions** generated by travel and other energy usage. The option we've used is NativeEnergy. <http://www.nativeenergy.com/how-carbon-offsets-work.html>

List one item in this area which you can do now and one you will consider for the future:

7) Household and work-place energy use: As you read through 7& 8 lists circle those which you are willing to pursue over the next several months:

a) Check with your electricity provider for energy efficiency action steps. For Progress Energy: <https://www.progress-energy.com/florida/home/save-energy-money/index.page>? One of the tools on that web-site is an Home Energy appliance usage Calculator.

b) Use "**Reducing Electricity Use**", an excellent online powerpoint presentation, as a guide to electricity and money savings: <http://www.gaiasguardians.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Reduce-Electric-Use-part1.pdf> by Andy Karpinski of Gaia's Guardians. My husband and I had already been practicing many steps of energy conservation and we were still able to reduce our electricity/natural gas bills by an additional 25%, down to an average of \$87 a month for 2012, by incorporating many of these steps in the last few years. Some of the changes we

have made are:

- Choose clothing which will keep you cool in summer, warm in winter. **Limit as much as possible the use of air conditioning and heating**, practicing accepting some discomfort as an act of love for the next generations.
- Change all **light bulbs** to compact fluorescent or LED; over the long-range they save money as well as energy/emissions. Save the old incandescent bulbs for use in little-used locations like closets (rather than throwing out!) Turn off all lights that are not really needed.
- **Unplug electronics when you are not using them;** one easy way is to hook up all computer-related items to one power strip, then turn off the power strip when you are not using the computer. And hook up all entertainment items to one power strip, turn it off when not using any of those items. Even when electronic devices are turned off, they use energy because of their "instantly-ready" systems. **Perhaps we can even cut way back on use of these devices, especially TV, and make careful decisions about when to purchase and use other electronics.**
- Line dry your clothes and air dry your dishes whenever possible. Clothes dryers and dishwashers take lots of fossil fuel energy (one load of either takes about 7 times the energy of one full load of cold water laundry wash, per Progress Energy calculator!)
- Choose the smallest, most efficient refrigerator you can find and keep the fridge and freezer sections full (it actually takes less energy to keep it cold if it is full). Donate any refrigerators which are used only for parties, retreats, special events, and when you "need" the second fridge, ask your neighbor for temporary space!

8) Energy and Water-saving steps and products:

a) Choose native plants (green lawns are not native to Florida), use rain barrels, stop using water and energy resources on sprinkler systems, stop using toxic pesticides and fossil-fuel based fertilizers, stop using fossil-fuel guzzling edgers and leaf blowers, replace areas which need mowing with mulch and food plants as landscaping!

b) Take very short showers, and use a low-flow showerhead to save on water heating. Install a low-volume toilet to save lots of water; this saves energy used in water pumping and sewer treatment systems, as well as saving the increasingly scarce resource of water!

c) For vegetable-based cleaning products (did you know that most laundry and dish detergents are fossil-fuel based?) which save fossil-fuels and are non-toxic or less toxic than the usual brands use Seventh Generation products.

9) Socially responsible investing:

If you have savings, especially savings for retirement which may be some years off, do you know what companies you are investing in? Have you looked at their impact on the environment? Are they polluting, using and /or extracting fossil-fuels like there is no end, investing in things like tobacco and weapons? Or are they investing in alternative energies development, affordable housing, education, community, health care, and environmental protection? For lots of great info and how-to's: <http://www.greenamerica.org/socialinvesting/>

I am deeply committed to community investing, especially where it offers empowerment to the poorest of the poor. I have invested my retirement funds so that they are useful to my sisters and brothers living in poverty now. If you are interested in exploring this option for your retirement money, or any other socially responsible investing, I recommend the investment advisors I work with,

<http://www.justmoneyadvisors.com/> and the company they are affiliated with, Natural Investments <http://naturalinvesting.com/> .

10) Join with others:

a) to create local communities of mutual support. Many of the resources I have studied related to the crises we face suggest that one of the blessings that we may be able to receive as a result of having to navigate perilous times is a renewal of our local communities. Family groups, faith communities (especially smaller circles within large congregations), neighborhoods, co-ops, community gardens, congregational Green Teams, Nonviolent Communication practice groups, etc. Communities who work together to address our basic life-support needs (food, shelter, etc), and social and spiritual needs. It will become crystal clear that our individualistic, narcissistic, "me-first", consuming, frenetically busy culture actually works against our survival.

One of these local communities which I have helped to form here in **Tampa Bay, Florida, is a group of psychotherapists which meets monthly to address the environmental and economic crises**, to support and encourage each other as we respond with personal and communal actions. Our communal actions include offering continuing education programs to other psychotherapists and crafting and circulating **An Open Letter to Mental Health Care Professionals, Workers and Organizations**, regarding the converging crises and our ethical responses. **If you are a psychotherapist and want more information, please email me.**

One global movement with initiatives in Florida is the Transition Movement:

<http://www.transitionus.org/> "The Transition Movement is a vibrant, grassroots movement that seeks to build community resilience in the face of such challenges as peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis. It represents one of the most promising ways of engaging people in strengthening their communities against the effects of these challenges, resulting in a life that is more abundant, fulfilling, equitable and socially connected. We believe that we can make the transition to a more sustainable world."

Look at your own circles of influence and invite your friends, family, faith community, work and social circles to study these concerns with you, and to begin to envision together how we all might live, work, pray and play together in ways which might help to create a viable future for the next generations.

List names of those in your circles of influence. Then list the thing(s) you have learned through this worksheet which you will share with those people in the coming week or two.

b) to take action to influence government and corporations to make the urgent changes needed. Pick a few groups which seem to be compatible with your views, research them, and then choose one or two to join. Join the action-alert networks of those groups and make the calls, send the emails/letters, go to the gatherings they organize. Our personal changes are essential. Yet, without city, state, national and global changes we will not make an adequate impact. Some options include:

To join with others in a religious response: <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>
(In Florida: <http://sunshinestateipl.org/> Sunshine State Interfaith Power and Light: Mobilizing faith communities in Florida to Care for Creation).

<http://www.sierraclub.org/> national and local. (In Florida: <http://florida.sierraclub.org/>)

www.350.org "building a global movement to solve the climate crisis"

Write down which group(s) you will research with goal of finding one or two to join:

And finally, to learn more about the realities which we are facing and ways you can be part of the shift to a life-sustaining society:

<http://www.myfootprint.org/en/> "This quiz estimates the size of your ecological footprint." As you take the quiz you can click on many items to learn more about the issues and find great groups to connect with.

"God has not called us to be successful, but faithful."

"Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

About Mary Ann

For many years I have affirmed that all of creation is sacred, that everything comes forth from the One Creator, and that we humans are meant to live in a community of love with God and all of Nature. I have learned by study and experiences that we humans too often exist without awareness of our interconnection with God and the universe, and that we therefore often choose ways of living which endanger the lives and health of ourselves, of other humans and of the very planet. However, since my prayer, study, and action have been focused primarily in the areas of war and violence, poverty and consumerism, addiction, relational wounds, personal trauma and depression, the environmental crises had been only at the edges of my awareness and work. I have been a justice and peace educator and activist since 1979 and a Christian psychotherapist in a Catholic parish since 1985. As a Haitian proverb says, "we all see from where we stand", so I write standing in the Catholic Christian spiritual tradition. I have also learned that God's Spirit is not limited to any one tradition, and that if you are rooted in a different tradition your viewpoint will enrich me.

In October 2006, at the request of a therapist colleague, I read a book addressing the converging environmental, energy, and economic crises, and this launched me into hours and hours of studying, reflecting, praying, attending conferences and group meetings, and writing about these interlocking crises.

To access this worksheet online to allow you to easily click on links, please go to

<http://paxchristiflorida.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/10actionstepsupdatedforearthday4-22-13.pdf>

If you would like a link to my list and synopses of books and web-sites, please ask.
