

## The Call to Live Simply

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“There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.” (G. K. Chesterton)

“All joy arises from a sense of being, while the main emphasis in our society is on having.” (Damaris Parker-Rhodes)

“Give me neither poverty nor riches, grant me only my share of bread to eat, for fear that surrounded by plenty, I should fall away and say, ‘Yahweh – who is Yahweh?’” (Proverbs 30:8-9)

“The earth is ultimately a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness – both individual and collective – are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence.” (Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, January 1, 1990)

Recently I was with a group of catechists, facilitating a session with them on “Catechesis and Social Justice.” During a discussion on the U.S. bishops’ themes of Catholic Social Teaching, the conversation turned to unanimous agreement that one of the challenges faced today, and underlying much of our work for justice and equality in all areas, is the growing pervasion of consumerism, the almost unconscious mindset and attitude of greed, the desire for more, for the newest thing, invention, gadget, fashion that is (so well, so skillfully, so attractively) marketed to us.

At the same time, I was inspired by this group of people as they told stories of themselves, their children – especially their teen-agers -- their entire family and how they are choosing to live, endeavoring to be more and more aware and do something about the reality

- that people are more important than things
- that there isn't a need to keep on accumulating "stuff"
- that they desire to share what they have with others
- that they wish to make time in their lives for people who might be lonely
- that they are called to be responsible trustees of their money, time, talent and the environment

I know that they're not alone (even though at times we may feel that way). There are more and more books, websites, and movements all the time talking about simple living, simplicity or voluntary simplicity.

Duane Elgin (*Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. Harper Paperbacks, 1998) has said, "Amid a frenzy of conspicuous consumption, an inconspicuous revolution has been stirring. A number of people are seeking a way of life that is more satisfying and sustainable. This quiet revolution is being called by many names, including voluntary simplicity and compassionate living. But whatever its name, its hallmark is a new common sense – namely, that life is too deep and consumerism is too shallow to provide soulful satisfaction."

Each year - among many other endeavors – is National Downshifting Week, held in mid April. Begun in the United Kingdom in 2005; it was "soft-launched" in the

United States in 2006. In 2007, 24 states participated (as well as many other countries). It was begun to help focus people's attention on downshifting and inspiring more people toward simpler, happier lives. National Downshifting Week is about:

- how we balance our time between our family, our loved ones and our work lives
- finding ways to appreciate more with less
- choosing and becoming comfortable with life at your own pace

Downshifting also tends to help in re-establishing a connection with, and feeling for, the environment.

Some suggested practices that individuals, families, and/or parishes might do during Downshifting Week (and continue even afterwards!):

- Time: Schedule a half-day off work to spend entirely with someone you love.
- Money: Cut up a credit card.
- Giving: Donate a bag of clothes, toys or household items to a local charity or homeless shelter.
- Create: Make a hand-made card for the next birthday or event on your calendar.
- Reduce: Eliminate three non-essential purchases this week.
- Communicate: Tonight, turn off the television, play some games (not computer) and talk.
- Community: Volunteer at a homeless shelter, hospital, local charity, etc.

- Organic: Cultivate a parish garden and grow some vegetables and fruits.
- Ecology: Get on the green track. What can your parish do to be more eco-friendly?
- Time: Are parish schedules people-friendly, family-friendly?
- Sabbath: Sabbath is a grounding principle of our faith. Do we take time to explore what it means in our multi-tasking world? How are we living it in our parish life? How are we helping our parishioners' live it at home?
- Paper-free: How/where can you save paper, postage and time by emailing parishioners; creatively using the parish website?
- Sharing: As a parish, how do we reduce non-essential items? How do we share what we have?

The website for National Downshifting Week is:

<http://www.downshiftingweek.com>

Some other helpful websites:

- <http://simplerreduce.blogspot.com>
- [www.earthhealing.info/fifty.htm](http://www.earthhealing.info/fifty.htm)
- [www.simpleliving.net](http://www.simpleliving.net)
- [www.gratefulness.org/t/simple.htm](http://www.gratefulness.org/t/simple.htm)