

MARKER 3: Ecological Economics

The Archdiocese of Washington is home to over 3 million people and encompasses a land area of over 2,000 square miles with 1,200 miles of ecologically critical shoreline. The Archdiocese is home to 655,000 Catholics. Washington, D.C. and Maryland are home to many governmental and non-profit organizations, and industries (health, technology, agriculture, etc.) vital for our economy. The archdiocese has tried to respond to environmental injustices suffered by those who are poor or vulnerable while also integrating Catholic social teaching into our economic decisions.

Housing

The Archdiocese of Washington works with parishes to develop affordable housing on underutilized land. Since 1979, Victory Housing Inc., the Archdiocese's development arm for affordable housing, has developed over 2,300 units in 32 properties. Several parishes have used excess land to develop affordable housing in partnership with Victory Housing, Inc. Possibilities for land use include affordable independent and assisted living housing, special-needs housing, health-care facilities, community gardens, food distribution centers, organic food co-ops, and solar fields such as the one recently developed by Catholic Charities.

Food

Food not only nourishes our bodies but it nurtures relationships, and celebrates cultural identities. Food is central to our faith. The Eucharist is not just bread and wine. It is the Body and Blood of Christ that nourishes our bodies and souls. Injustices and inequities in our food system—from source to table—remind us that eating is also an act that has moral consequences. Our food system reflects broader inequities in society. Many farmers experience economic insecurity at the hands of large corporations that dominate our food system and by unpredictable events and government policies. This economic insecurity impacts farmers, and (migrant) farm workers.

Green Space

Parishes can support efforts to create and preserve green spaces such as parks, community gardens, and playgrounds. Catholic universities, hospital systems, religious orders, and parish schools can all help in these efforts. Such projects can have an impact on neighborhoods. As an example of how Catholic organizations can create green spaces, Casey Trees and Mt. Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Washington, D.C. have collaborated with parishes to reforest a significant section of unused cemetery land. Casey Trees has also partnered with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and St. Anthony's Catholic School in Washington, D.C. to plant trees on the school's urban campus.

Possible actions for individuals, families, parishes and schools:

- Reduce food waste (easy)
- Reduce meat-based meals (easy)
- Consider alternative uses for your parish property (easy to moderate)
 - Build a parish garden (moderate)
 - Use the parking lot for a local CSA (community sustained agriculture) drop off or farmers market spot (moderate)
- Buy locally produced and prepared food (easy to advanced)
- Buy fair trade and sustainably-produced food (easy to advanced)
- Participate in a CSA program or local farmers market (easy to advanced)
- Model healthy and just purchasing practices in all activities for parishes and parish schools (easy to advanced)
- Improve access to nutritious foods (moderate)
- Build and eat from home gardens (moderate)
- Lobby to utilize public land to build community gardens (moderate to advanced)
- Compost food scraps (advanced)