

**Earth Day Remarks**  
**Comments of PUC Commissioner Rachelle Chong**  
**April 22, 2007**  
**Stockton, CA**

*“Earth Day Is About Loving Mother Earth”*

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) God created everything on this earth that we use, and no matter what we build, discover, invent or make, given time, it will return to the basic elements from which it came. We are only caretakers and stewards of that which was created in the beginning by our Lord.

Today this congregation joins 500 million people and 175 national governments celebrating Earth Day.

Earth Day is about loving Mother Earth.

Earth Day reminds us that we are stewards of the earth, and we should take care of our planet.

Earth Day is about working together – as individuals, as citizens of our state, and as nations -- because what each of us does impacts others.

How did Earth Day begin? In the Sixties, many serious environmental problems were making people worried. There was bad air pollution in places like New York and Los Angeles with noxious fumes being spewed out by cars and factories.

In the Great Lakes, there were hundreds of fish dying from the pollution.

Cleveland’s Cayahoga River that was so inundated with oil, toxic chemicals and debris that the river spontaneously caught fire three times.

The “Torrey Canyon” supertanker was grounded off the coast of England causing a terrible oil spill.

These awful events made people worry about the future of our earth. After viewing the site of a bad oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, US Senator Gaylord Nelson returned to Washington, D.C. so outraged that he penned a bill that was passed calling for a national day to celebrate the earth. This Earth Day was to be an “environmental teach in” to be held on each April 22nd.

On the very first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, twenty million Americans gathered together across the nation. It was the people’s day to demand that our

government and corporate leaders take immediate actions to safeguard the earth's health.

In New York City, Mayor John Lindsay allowed traffic to be stopped on Fifth Avenue for two hours for the first Earth Day rally in 1970. Famous actor Paul Newman and actress Ali McGraw appeared, helping the rally receive newspaper headlines and live TV coverage.

One group of demonstrators walked along Fifth Avenue with a net filled with dead fish, shouting to people passing by, "This could be you!"

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., impassioned speeches were made near the Washington Monument. Famous singers like Pete Seeger sang songs calling people to action. It was pledged that environmentalism was not going to be a fad, but a movement built with a broad base that transcends political boundaries.

Indeed, public opinion polls show that after the first Earth Day in 1970, 25% of the public believed that protecting the environment had to be an important goal, a 2,500 percent increase over the prior year of 1969. Many environmental laws were passed after that first Earth Day, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. We now have both a federal and a state environmental protection agency.

So here we are, 37 years later. While things are much better than in the Sixties, there have been many environmental incidents such as the toxic landfill causing birth defects and cancer at Love Canal, radioactive material leaks at the nuclear facility Three Mile Island, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill to remind us that there is still much to be done.

Acid rain, climate change, global warming and ozone depletion show how environmental issues are still very complex and important.

Let's focus for a minute on **climate change**, meaning a change in long term weather patterns. What is the problem? Scientists tell us that the earth has warmed about 1 percent Fahrenheit over the past 100 years. The scientists are not exactly sure why, but they do think that things people are doing are making the earth warmer.

One thing the scientists are sure about is the so-called **green house effect**. They know that green house gases make the earth warmer by trapping energy in the atmosphere.

**Global warming** means an average increase in the Earth's temperature, which in turn causes changes to our climate. A warmer earth may lead to changes in rainfall patterns, a rise in the sea level, and a wide range of impacts on plants, wildlife and humans. Scientists are worried about global warming caused by human activities.

Average global temperatures are expected to increase an additional 2-6 degrees Fahrenheit over the next 100 years. Even though that does not sound like very much, this is enough to change the earth's climate very seriously. During the last Ice Age on Earth (about 18,000 years ago), the temperature was only 7 degrees colder than it is today, and glaciers covered most of North America.

Even a small increase in temperature can change the climate a lot. Warmer weather makes water expand and will melt glaciers. This will raise the sea level as much as 3 feet in the next century. This may cover up beaches and cause coastal flooding. Some animals could die.

One contributing factor to the green house gas effect is our use of machines beginning about 200 years ago in the Industrial Revolution to make life easier. Now, through population growth, the burning of fossil fuels, and deforestation, humans are impacting the mixture of gases in the atmosphere. Energy such as the gas that runs our cars and energy used to light and heat our homes, comes from fuels like coal and oil, so-called "fossil fuels." Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide and other green house gases into the air, which in turn makes our planet warmer.

You send green house gases in the air when you watch TV, use your air conditioner, turn on a light, ride in a car, use your washer or microwave a meal.

Also trash we send to landfills produces a green house gas called methane. Methane is also produced by animals raised for dairy and meat products (such as cows, pigs, sheep). Methane is released when companies take coal out of the ground. Factories also send green house gas in the air.

So what can we do to minimize the green house gases released into the atmosphere that contribute to climate change?

I am here to ask each one of you to do your part to reduce your green house gas emissions, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, and make the air cleaner. In the process, you will also save money.

We can keep the earth clean by following the rule of "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle."

"Reduce" means "use less." Reduce your use of water, electricity or gasoline.

"Reuse" means use again, such as jars, plastic bags and boxes.

"Recycle" means make something new from something old. Recycle aluminum, paper and plastic.

Here are 10 ideas:

1. **Change a light** - Replacing a regular light bulb with a compact fluorescent light bulb like this one will save 150 pounds of carbon dioxide a year. I am donating these two CFL light bulbs to the church. If every California installed one of these lights, we would not need to build a power plant.
2. **Drive less** - Carpool, walk, combine errands, or take public transportation.
3. **Recycle more** - Save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide per year by recycling just half your waste. It just takes that split second when you throw your waste away-- either to the trash can or to the recycle bin.
4. **Check your tires** - Keeping your car tires properly inflated can improve gas mileage by more than 3%. With gas prices high, this helps save you gas money too.
5. **Use less hot water** - Installing a low flow showerhead (350 pounds of CO2 saved per year), taking a shorter shower, and washing your clothes in cold or warm water (500 pounds of CO2 saved) saves you energy by using less hot water.
6. **Avoid products with a lot of packaging** - You can save 1200 pounds of CO2 if you cut down your garbage by 10%!
7. **Adjust your thermostat** - Moving your thermostat down 2 degrees in winter and up 2 degrees in summer could save 2000 pounds of CO2 a year. You probably won't even notice the difference.
8. **Plant a tree** - A single tree will absorb one ton of CO2 over its lifetime.
9. **Be a part of the solution** - You can make a difference and help us solve this societal problem, for your own sake and for our future generations.
10. **Tell a friend** - You have no idea how contagious your actions can be by mentioning what you are doing to your family and friends.

My daughters are handing out some freebies for you compliments of your local gas and electric company, PG&E. I recommend the little booklet from PG&E entitled "30 Simple Energy Things YOU Can Do to Save the Earth." Please take it home and, as the minister suggests, pledge to do at least one of the things inside the book to do your part to save the earth.

In closing, Earth Day is a commitment to make life better, not just bigger and faster. It is a day to look beyond tomorrow to make sure we leave an Earth as beautiful as God created it for our children.

So remember: "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle." Don't let your carbon print on this earth be too big.

After all, Earth Day is about loving Mother Earth. Thank you, Jola, for inviting me to be here today. It feels good to be back at St. Mark's.