



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Distinct Voice: Presence to Earth

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To be called to the community of Mercy is to live a life lead by a deep compassion for the world around you. Many of us champion many causes. Inundated daily with images of the world around us and plights calling to be heard. The ready access to information provided by the ever-advancing technologies of this world can make these many plights overwhelming. With many of us being so attuned to the needs of others we lend ourselves susceptible to compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is a condition described as emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a reduced ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring. It is sometimes referred to as secondary traumatic stress. While there are many plights that can cause us unrest one of the most common is the call to protect the earth.

From a young age we are taught that we are stewards of the earth entrusted to us by God. I remember as child the idea of being a “steward”, a person in a position to provide care, filled me with a quiet joy that made me stand a little taller as I embraced this sense of purpose. Today it’s easy to get overwhelmed by the many environmental concerns facing communities around the world. In no particular order:

- Global warming
- Pollution: Ensuring we have clean air and clean water while safely tackling the issue of waste
- Population Growth
- Sustainable management of Arable land
- Dependence on Fossil Fuels

Just to name a few. Inundated with headlines touting “disaster”, “Dangerous”, “Damage”, “Crisis”, “Problem” and “Doomsday” it’s easy to see why compassion fatigue happens.

“The Environment is God’s Gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole”

Pope Benedict XVI

So what do we know about these issues? With all the information out there (and misinformation), how do we know what is true? And how do we make a difference? As humans, we make the world around us easier to understand by making generalizations which can be very biased. The media we consume is often made up of events where the “unusual” is exaggerated and the spotlight is on swift changes. The slow and steady nature of shifting major trends doesn’t get much attention. Unknowingly we often base our opinion of the world around us, and consequently the decisions on how to address issues, based on misinformation.

I want to start by challenging your perception of the world around you by asking you a series of 5 short questions. You may get some of these questions right, a few of you may even get all of them right! (If so, I think you deserve to treat yourself to some chocolate) but I think there will be a few questions for each of you that may take you by surprise. So grab a piece of paper or open a new note in your phone and record your answers. The answers will be at the end of this article (No Cheating!)

Question 1: The United Nations predicts that by 2100 the world population will have increased by another 4 billion people. What is the main reason?

- a) There will be more children (under age 15).
- b) There will be more adults (15-75).
- c) There will be more very old people (above age 75).

Question 2: Carbon Emissions in New York have changed how much since this time last year?

- a) Increased by 20%
- b) Decreased by 20%
- c) Increased by 50%
- d) Decreased by 50%

Question 3: The southern jet stream which affects weather in the southern hemisphere is being affected how by current practices?

- a) Continues to move south as damage to the ozone continues
- b) Remains in relatively the same place as damage to the ozone has remained stable
- c) Has started returning to its normal position as damage to the ozone begins to be repaired.

Question 4: When compared to that of 1991, Energy related CO2 Emissions in 2016 were what?

- a) Were Lower
- b) Were the same
- c) Were Higher

Between 2000 and 2019 China's usage of renewable energy has done what?

- a) Remained the same
- b) Doubled
- c) Tripled
- d) More than quadrupled

So how did you go with those questions?

When you got the answer wrong would you say your response was more pessimistic or optimistic than the correct answer?

Why do you think that was?

And what was the point of me asking all those questions? Am I trying to tell you that we've done it, we've saved the world and we can all relax and continue life? No not exactly. I am in no way trying to down play the many environmental issues that continue to plague us. But when we start to feel overwhelmed with it all sometimes it's important to step back and look at where we've come from. To stop and examine the data and see what it's really trying to tell us. Our population is growing but not because we are reproducing at an increasing rate with no disregard for the availability of resources. It's increasing because our health care is improving and the number of people living in extreme poverty has decreased by over 60% (Between 1990 and 2015). This means the population growth will eventually flatten out. It also means that while population growth is likely to put strains on our resources (if we don't change to more renewable lifestyles) reducing the number of children born is realistically only going to result in a host of other problems associated with an aging population.

Sitting back and looking at the data doesn't just put us in a better place practically to tackle big issues but, as we've seen, it can help us emotionally, mentally and physically as well by reducing compassion fatigue. Reducing compassion fatigue means we have more energy to give to the causes we care about and stay present. So here are 10 tips to help combat compassion fatigue and stay present with our call to earth:

1. Get enough sleep
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Vary the work that you do.
4. Exercise.
5. Do something you enjoy.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Find a reason to laugh.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

And the next time you're trying to engage someone in a cause you care about maybe you will focus on the positive rather than starting with the negative "Look at the progress we have made so far, you can help us keep it going!"

"The simplest and most practical lesson I know is to resolve to be good today, but better tomorrow."

Catherine McAuley

Answers: 1B, 2D, 3C, 4A, 5D

You can find more resources to help with compassion fatigue here:

<http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>

And if you'd like to challenge your perceptions of the world around you a little more please check out: <http://gapminder.org/>