

**DEVELOPING CREATION STEWARDSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY:
A MEANS TO AN END OR AN END TO THE MEANS**

The Church’s concern over environmental issues has been discussed and addressed at many levels over the last couple of decades. Both John Paul II and Benedict the XVI elaborated that the underlying priority of all efforts for environmental integrity, energy justice and care for creation is a concern for the dignity and well being of the human person. The challenge in addressing the need for economic development, environmental protection, the problems of over consumerism and over utilization of energy resources while maintaining respect for the needs and dignity of human persons is complicated to say the least. However, most will agree that the individual human dimension is a critical factor. If an individual can develop a faith-based stewardship ethic and lifestyle, many positive direct and indirect outcomes can be facilitated.

There is recognition that developing a stewardship ethic and lifestyle can empower individuals to contribute to the care for

creation. Likewise that stewardship process can contribute to the development of discipline and energy to more fully live the “Christian Life”. In other words the quest to become a steward has many other implications. Practicing a stewardship ethic and lifestyle can be an “end”, meeting the needs of God’s creation (the environment). At the same time there is reciprocity for the human person. The process of developing and practicing a stewardship ethic and lifestyle is also a “means”, for meeting the needs of the human person.

We can learn much from the margins and often times principles are clarified in those contexts. Much of my professional life involved implementing nature and physical fitness programs for at-risk youth in the inner city as vehicles for preventing substance abuse, delinquency and related problems. That experience has led to many conclusions about human needs. Unfortunately, with modern day “psycho babble”, many human needs and problems

can get inappropriately defined as “disorders”. However, there can be a role for the use of such terminology and, in terms of environmental and personal health issues, I have found two “deficit disorders” whose realities have implications for stewardship and caring for creation. In turn, those “deficit disorders” are reflective of the disconnection consequences from the ruptures of sin in the world explored within reconciliation theology.

“Deficit” Disorders

The first reality is that many youth suffer from **nature deficit disorder**. This term, made popular by Richard Louv in his book “Last Child in the Woods”, refers to the fact that many of us (but especially youth) are disconnected and alienated from nature. As a consequence many do not know, understand or appreciate God’s creation with the resultant effect of not caring about the environment, being afraid of nature, and, as a “disorder”; it keeps us from being creation stewards. Statistics indicate a 50% drop in time spent outdoors by youth and adults in America in the last 25 years.

The second reality is that of youth and adults suffering from **exercise deficit disorder**. It

refers to the fact that there is a corresponding disconnection and alienation from physical activity. The result is a lack of energy and the development of many health related problems such as obesity. Statistics indicate that 50% of American youth are obese and get little or no daily exercise. As a disorder it keeps us from having the energy, the will, and the discipline to be a creation steward.

The conclusions from many surveys consistently show that youth tend to not have positive stewardship habits whether in the context of the environment or the body (physical fitness). This is an international phenomenon especially as cultures become more urbanized. It can be reflective of not having developed a stewardship ethic especially one grounded in our faith. The consequences of this is that we see, for many youth, lifestyle habits that lead to an unconcern for creation, an epidemic of obesity and inactivity, and lack of exercise. Inactive individuals are not going to be involved in nature activities.

Efforts focused to help youth overcome these “disorders” can provide a focus and

framework for faith and stewardship development. As John Paul II stated:

“...society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at lifestyle.”²

Overcoming nature and exercise deficits disorders leads to a personal and individual stewardship lifestyle.

Developing a Stewardship Ethic for the Environment

The experience of working with stewardship initiatives through CREATIO, an apostolate of the Christian Life Movement (CLM), its affiliated John Paul II Adventure Institute, as well as with state and federal park nature interpretation programs has provided a perspective for confronting “nature deficit disorder” by developing a stewardship ethic and lifestyle. As a consequence, I have defined a model with five phases to overcome nature deficit disorder. To proceed from Step 1 through step 5, individuals must develop:

1. **FAMILIARITY** with creation through experiences with the natural world.

2. **APPRECIATION** for the natural world which can be accomplished by reflecting on experiences with creation.
3. **AWARENESS** that there is more to know of nature, environmental problems and an ethic for how we should respond to those problems.
4. **CONCERN** for the environment. This precedes taking action and provides motivation for the final step.
5. **STEWARDSHIP** lifestyle to act to respond to environmental issues.

Those five phases can be viewed as objectives for developing a stewardship lifestyle. In turn, there are three steps to meeting those objectives which provide the framework for leading one through those five phases: Encountering, Exploring and Engaging.

- **ENCOUNTERING** God’s creation and nature. The process of encountering is to awaken enthusiasm for nature to have a familiarity and appreciation with creation.
- **EXPLORING** environmental issues and ethics. This involves becoming aware of the major environmental issues, the human role in them, and a Catholic

based ethic for addressing them. In addition, it can involve a process for examining personal lifestyle and community needs.

- **ENGAGING creation.** This is the action element where concern motivates stewardship actions individually and collectively.

Developing a Stewardship Ethic of the Body

The experience of providing outdoor education and exercise programs has led to the conclusion that stewardship of the environment can be favorably affected by individuals becoming more active and physically fit. The human body is a self-regulating energy producer and user. Governments, especially of developed nations and educational institutions, are encouraged to promote individual physical activity and consequent physical fitness to develop more efficient energy systems within their bodies. In turn, the use of self-movement modalities such as walking and cycling can decrease the reliance on fossil fuel based transportation. At another level, a fit and active individual has the energy and discipline to be more actively involved in

environmental stewardship actions – individually and collectively.

Physical activity can be a powerful vehicle for developing a stewardship ethic through activities that connect with nature. While the focus here is on exercise and fitness within the context of stewardship, facilitating a fit and active lifestyle is also, by itself, a positive force for one's physical and mental health. In summary, by caring for your body, you care for creation. A parallel five-phase process can be developed:

1. **FAMILIARITY** with one's body by having experiences with movement and activity.
2. **APPRECIATION** for the body's capability to give us energy, strength and physical prowess. This can be accomplished by reflecting on the body's response to being stressed through exercise.
3. Developing an **AWARENESS** to seek to know more of the physical, mental and spiritual ethic for why we need to train our body.
4. **CONCERN** for the body and physical fitness. This precedes taking action and provides motivation for the final step.

5. A STEWARDSHIP lifestyle to act to respond to the nutritional and exercise needs of the body.

The same three steps to meeting these objectives can be operationalized for stewardship of the body:

- ENCOUNTERING the body by experiencing and observing its reactions to physical activity.
- EXPLORING health and fitness issues and ethics. This involves becoming aware of one’s level of physical activity and fitness and a Catholic based ethic for being fit.
- ENGAGING your body. This is the action element where concern motivates practicing an exercise and nutritional lifestyle to develop energy and dynamic health.

Putting it All Together – Physical Activity As a Nature Connection Process

Conceptually, stewardship of the environment and the body can be viewed as parallel endeavors. One is aimed toward ensuring a “fit” environment or creation and

the other ensures a “fit” body. Table 1 illustrates this:

<u>ENVIRONMENTAL CONCEPTS</u>	<u>PHYSICAL HEALTH/FITNESS CONCEPTS</u>
1. Ecosystem	= Our body
2. Carrying capacity	= Physical fitness
3. Physical habitat	= Lifestyle habits
4. Habitat characteristics	= Health/fitness characteristics
* Adequate water	= * Proper water and fluids
* Adequate food	= * Proper nutrition
* Adequate shelter	= * Maintenance of strength+flexibility
* Adequate space	= * Maintenance of movement capability
* Adequate air quality	= * Maintenance of cardiorespiratory endurance
5. Symbiotic relationships	= Body health systems
* Plants, animals and man	= * Metabolic, nutrition, muscle-skeletal and cardiovascular systems
6. “Healthy” habitat management	= Healthy lifestyle habits
7. Environment “stewardship” program	= Fitness program as stewardship of the “body”
* Preservation and conservation	= * Exercise, nutrition, rest
* Restoration	= * Rehabilitation
* Personal decisions to help the ecosystem habitat	= * Personal decisions to maintain fitness

Physical activity, while directly confronting exercise deficit disorder, also serves as a nature connection process to overcome nature deficit disorder. Taking walks and hikes in public lands, doing simple yard work to being involved in a variety of environmental preservation, conservation and restoration endeavors can all be vehicles to increase physical activity and interact with nature. In turn, the process of developing fitness provides the energy needed to perform environmental stewardship activities.

The faith link – Reconciliation

There is a long Catholic tradition of an environmental stewardship ethic based on Holy Tradition and Sacred Scripture about what our role in the environment is and how we should respond to God’s creation¹. In recent years that ethic has received a renewal under the leadership of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI. A quote from John Paul II illustrates this.

“It is the duty of Christians and all who look to God the Creator to protect the environment by restoring a sense of reverence for the whole of God’s creation. It is the Creator’s will that man should treat nature not as ruthless exploiter but as an intelligent and responsible administrator.”²

What many are not aware of is a parallel Catholic ethic on stewardship of the body. Sacred Scripture, the early Church fathers, and recent Popes have all provided insights into our responsibility to care for our bodies with corresponding theological, philosophical, psychological and physiological rationales for the importance of being stewards for our bodies. Another quote from John Paul II illustrates this.

“ For the Church cannot but encourage everything that serves the harmonious development of the human body, rightly considered the masterpiece of the whole of creation, not only because of it’s proportion, vigor and beauty, but also and especially because God made it his dwelling and the instrument of an immortal soul, breathing into it that breath of life. There is a need to find free time to exercise strength and dexterity, endurance and harmonious movement so as to guarantee that physical efficiency necessary to man’s overall equilibrium. For this reason, the Church does not cease to recommend the best use of this marvelous instrument by a suitable physical education which...trains both body and spirit for effort, courage, balance, sacrifice, nobility, brotherhood, courtesy and in a word, fair play.”³

The Christian Life Movement (CLM) provides a focus for living the Christian life by highlighting reconciliation as an approach to one’s spirituality with many implications for practicing stewardship. Within the CLM our faith journey can be viewed as an ongoing reconciliation process to overcome the ruptures of sin in the world that we have experienced at four levels: 1)

with God, 2) with oneself, 3) with others and 4) with creation (nature). The challenge, as Christians, is to strive to be reconciled at all four levels. CREATIO as an apostolate of the CLM attempts to address these ruptures through focused efforts on developing a stewardship ethic with nature and with ourselves (through physical fitness) in that our bodies are also part of God’s creation. That reconciliation theme can provide a basis for actions in the world to get back to the original plan of God as an ordered, good, and harmonious creation. While the focus is on environmental actions for reconciliation with the forth rupture (creation), such endeavors are ultimately aimed to renew and restore the many broken relationships in the world within all four ruptures.

Mind or intellect, heart or soul, stewardship action or body are conceptualized as the three levels or pathways to reconciliation within the CLM. They are all interrelated in that the human person needs to live reconciliation in his/her entire being: mind, heart, and action.

These domains associated with reconciliation theology can be conceptually linked to stewardship of the body through

physical fitness. By making this link it is possible to add a new and important “action” dimension to apostolic efforts. Since the notion of stewardship of the body has received little attention in the past it can aid understanding by exploring it as the “action” dimension for expanding our energy for reconciliation spirituality.

One way of viewing this action dimension is that we are trying to be reconciled by moving from being spectators in our faith to participants. That participation can take several forms. To participate requires having physical, mental and spiritual energy. That energy is developed through exercise and physical activity to develop physical fitness. We develop ourselves as participants and we help others to be participants by making the effort to live fully within our body. The action aspect of stewardship can be initiated by practicing the most basic form of stewardship – stewardship of the body. Each of the four reconciliation domains can be explored for the physical fitness and exercise implications:

Reconciliation with God

- Jesus was our model of a healthy fitness lifestyle. If we truly want to be like him

we need to follow his physical role model.

- Maintaining a fitness lifestyle can provide the self-discipline to focus and reflect more on our relationship with God, teaches humility to “give up” the illusion of control and trust God more, and activities such as walking can facilitate an active prayer life.

Reconciliation with Self

- The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so practicing a healthy fitness lifestyle supports that “temple”.
- Practicing a fitness lifestyle can be a transferable self-discipline that can be applied to serving God, can serve as a healthy outlet for dealing with anger, stress and depression, can aid in developing a needed balance in our lives, and is an honest process that allows us to know more about ourselves - who am I at the deepest level (what am I lacking?, what do I need to change?).

Reconciliation with Others

- At any point in time we are a role model for practicing the Christian life – for better or for worse. How well we serve as role models influences our impact on others.

Thomas R. Collingwood Ph.D – July, 2013

- Practicing a fitness lifestyle helps to maintain the energy to be able to help meet the needs of others and encourage others to practice a healthy fitness lifestyle so they have the energy to help themselves.

Reconciliation with Creation

- Participate with creation by trying to be a “good animal” through eating and exercise habits that support and help sustain natural habitats.
- Practicing a fitness lifestyle is necessary to maintain the energy to provide stewardship actions for the environment.

Conclusion

The development of a stewardship of creation and stewardship of the body lifestyle can provide a means to confront nature deficit and exercise deficit disorders. Likewise, it provides a process to develop a stewardship ethic that translates to a concern and commitment to care for God’s creation. At another level a stewardship lifestyle serves as concrete actions to facilitate the need for reconciliation with God, ourselves, with others and creation.

Notes

1. General references: Selected Scriptural references referring to stewardship of creation and the body

Creation	Body
Genesis 1: 26-28	Romans 12:1,2
Genesis 2: 15	1 Corinthians 3: 16,17
Psalms 8: 6-9	1 Corinthians 6: 13
Proverbs 27:23	1 Corinthians 6: 19,20
Wisdom 9, 2,3	1 Corinthians 9: 25-27
Sirach 17;3,4	1Thessolonians 5:23
1 Peter 4:10	Hebrews 12; 12,13

Selected references from Holy Tradition sources referring to stewardship of creation and the body.

Creation

Pope Benedict XVI, “If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.” World Day of Peace message given January 1, 2010, The Vatican: paragraph 5.

Pope John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation.” World Day of Peace message given January 1, 1990, The Vatican: retrieved April 4, 2007, from < http://www.ncrlc.com/ecological_crisis.html>, p.1.

United States Catholic Conference, Catechism of the Catholic Church for the

United States of America, New York, NY, Doubleday. 1994. Paragraphs 2432, 2456.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions. Washington DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2003

The body

Ballou, Ralph, “An Analysis of the Writings of Selected Church Fathers to AD 394 to Reveal Attitudes Regarding Physical Activity.” in Zeigler, Earle. (ed.) A History of Sport and Physical Education to 1900, Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing, 1973 p. 191.

Pope John Paul II, “Sport as a Training Ground for Virtue and Instrument of Union Among People” Address given December 20, 1979 in Rome, Italy, reprinted in Collingwood, Thomas, R., Spirit, Mind and Body, A Christian Foundation for Fitness, Baltimore, MD, Publish America, 2005, p. 46.

Pope Pius XII, “The True Value of Physical Culture.” Radio address given October 6, 1948 in Bolivia, , reprinted in Collingwood, Thomas, R., Spirit, Mind and Body, A

Christian Foundation for Fitness, Baltimore, MD, Publish America, 2005, p. 39.

United States Catholic Conference, Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America, New York, NY, Doubleday. 1994. Paragraphs 364,365.

2. Pope John Paul II, “Duty of Christians to Protect the Environment.” Address given to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Asia, November 6, 1999, Rome: retrieved May 23, 2008, from <http://conservation.catholic.org/more_pope_john_paul_ii.htm>, p.10.

3. Pope John Paul II, “Let the Practice of Sport Always Promote Peace.” Address given October 11, 1981 in Rome, Italy, reprinted in Collingwood, Thomas, R., Spirit, Mind and Body, A Christian Foundation for Fitness, Baltimore, MD, Publish America, 2005, p. 35.