

Ten Steps in Active Hope for Our Personal and Global Health Updated August 2021

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When we face difficult times and painful events, whether at the personal, family, local or global community levels, one of our common challenges relates to the question of hope. Most of us have learned to think of hope as optimism, hoping for “good outcomes”. Yet often our challenges do not seem likely to be resolved in the way we would really like, and then we are tempted to close off through denial, blaming others, or waiting for a rescue; or to try to escape through busyness and addictive behaviors; or to sink into discouragement, hopelessness, even despair.

The times in which we live are presenting all of us with challenges that seem not to have easy or even realistic possibilities for “good outcomes”. In addition to the difficulties all humans experience at times (relationship tensions, deaths, illnesses, economic stresses, addictions, anxiety and depression, loss of meaning, religious or faith crises, etc.) we are now also becoming more aware of the interlocking global crises, two of which at this time (August 2021) are affecting everyone on our planet (the pandemic and the climate emergency).

As I have engaged in extensive study, prayer, reflection, group gatherings and action, related to the converging global crises over the last 15 years, I have been grateful for resources which help me to cultivate a different kind of hope. One book defines this as “Active Hope”.

“Active Hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for. Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do rather than have. It is a process we can apply to any situation, and it involves three key steps. First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we'd like things to move in or the values we'd like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction.”, page 3, **Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy** by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, 2012.

It is likely that each one reading this is already engaged in work which is valuable, whether that work is in healing bodies, souls and/or relationships, nurturing families, easing poverty and other suffering, bringing non-violent respect for life to violent situations, etc., along with tending to the basic needs of ourselves and our families.

I have come to believe that, while we certainly can't drop those endeavors, we must allow a growing awareness of these global crises to deeply influence how we do all our other work. It is all connected. We are all connected.

I have updated this document (which I first developed for a Caring for God's Creation conference in April 2008), to offer some very practical steps each of us can take that will help us live Active Hope. I am updating this during early August 2021, the week in which the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report on the state of the climate crisis. *"It is a report that frames, in the cautious language of science, the dire state of the world. This panel of experts from around the world found that warming of 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius in the next century is certain unless there are extreme and immediate cuts in greenhouse gases. This level of warming would spread and intensify the kinds of extreme weather — hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and heat waves — we have seen unfold for over a decade. This report shows us the reality that our actions will not be enough to prevent catastrophic climate change. Immediate action on climate can prevent the worst effects of climate change — but catastrophe has already happened. Catastrophes are happening all around us."* <https://sojo.net/articles/hope-climate-survival-strategy>

Also see <https://sojo.net/articles/un-sounds-deafening-warning-climate-change>

This transformative action, empowered by the Source of Love, in my experience is the best antidote to denial, escapism, and despair. May this resource support you in your practice of Active Hope!

"God has not called us to be successful, but faithful."

"Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

About Mary Ann

For many years I have affirmed that all of creation is sacred, that everything comes forth from the One Creator, and that we humans are meant to live in a community of love with God and all of Nature. I have learned by study and experiences that we humans too often exist without awareness of our interconnection with God, each other, the Earth, and the whole universe, and that we therefore often choose ways of living which endanger the lives and health of ourselves, of other humans and of the very planet.

I have been a justice and peace educator and activist since 1979 and a Christian psychotherapist in a Catholic parish since 1985. However, until 2006 my prayer, study, and action had been focused primarily in the areas of war and violence, poverty and consumerism, addiction, relational wounds, personal trauma and depression, while the environmental crises had been only at the edges of my awareness and work.

In October 2006, at the request of a therapist colleague, I read a book addressing the converging environmental, energy, and economic crises, and this launched me into hours and hours of studying, reflecting, praying, attending conferences and group meetings, and writing about these interlocking crises.

As a Haitian proverb says, "we all see from where we stand", so I write standing in the Catholic Christian spiritual tradition. I have also learned that God's Spirit is not limited to any one tradition, and that if you are rooted in a different tradition your viewpoint will enrich me; therefore I hope to offer an inclusive invitation to all who read this.

Action Steps

As you read this resource, take time to celebrate the steps you are already engaged in. Especially when we are all already experiencing the additional stressors created by the pandemic, it is very helpful to focus on ways we have already been acting for the common good!

Then choose the next one or two which you will add in this week, month, or year beginning with items from Steps 1 & 2. Note a regular review date on your calendar. (I review this every Earth Day, April 22).

1) a) Connecting to the Source of Love; and 1) b) Creating a Plan for Healthy Self-Care and Stress Protection To access and sustain the spiritual, emotional, and physical energy we require in order to be able to contribute our part in the transition to a life-sustaining society, we need both spiritual practices and healthy self-care.

1) a) Daily prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading and study: whatever practices inform and inspire you; help you to be rooted in Divine Love, connection, compassion and hope; and help you open to Divine guidance. ***Check the spiritual reading and practice(s) below which helps to root you in Love and/or which of the resources you will explore in the coming week(s):***

- For study and inspiration, the May 2015 **Letter from Pope Francis *Laudato Si: ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME***
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf
- **Sacred Space**: daily on-line prayer guide using Judeo-Christian Scripture readings: <http://www.sacredspace.ie/> . For those who prefer audio, <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>
- **Gratefulness practice**: <http://www.gratefulness.org/> Founded by Brother David Steindl-Rast, OSB, an interfaith site with many resources to help root us in gratefulness : *“Grateful living is a universal ethic capable of ushering us peacefully into a new era in which we must share the world's resources fairly and conserve the environment for future generations.”*
- **Centering Prayer**: a method of prayer which helps form us in contemplative prayer and living: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/>

- **The Online Meditation Chapel:** this has been a great gift to me during the pandemic! <https://meditationchapel.org/>
- **The Center for Action and Contemplation:** <https://cac.org/>

1 b) *Plan a time this week to begin to create a Healthy Self-Care and Stress Protection Plan.*

As the pandemic erupted, I needed simplicity and so developed **My “basic three”**:

- **Present moment living** (One Day at a Time): grounding myself in God's presence right here and now, every time I notice I have tensed up and/or am worrying.
- **Gratefulness:** practicing all through the day, and when wakeful during the night, focusing on specific things, people, events, etc. that I am grateful for. Focusing on “thank you” prayers in place of “please, please” prayers (this shifts our awareness from fearful pleas to thanksgiving and thereby calms our whole being).
- **Service:** helping others in whatever way I am able and led by God. Examples: offering my distress in solidarity with others who are suffering in similar or more intense ways, calling a friend to check how they are doing, physically helping someone in my home or neighborhood, or making a donation to St Vincent de Paul or Daystar or Partners with Haiti to help with pressing needs right now.

For more ideas: my Counseling Ministry web-columns:

“Living Well with Multiple Stressors” and “Moving from Stress to Relaxation”, and “The Healing Practice of Thanksgiving”, especially because “*When tackling issues such as climate change, the stance of gratitude is a refreshing alternative to guilt or fear as a source of motivation.*”, page 56, **Active Hope**.

All three columns can be accessed at:

<https://stpaulstpete.com/ministries-page/counseling/>

2) Get outdoors and open up to the revelation of Love through all of creation. Experience our physical connection to the Earth community.

a) individuals: Walk, garden, sit and breathe, etc.

b) couples/families: Our families are increasingly being pulled away from time together by technologies such as video games, smartphones, PCs and social media.

We are living in terribly fast-paced ways, flooded often with stress chemicals. This lifestyle sets us up for more irritability, unresolved conflict, loss of connection with each other and the Earth. Make time with your spouse and with other family members to take walks or ride bikes, to go on picnics at the park or beach, to go to nature preserves for guided hikes, garden, etc.

What is one outdoor activity you will enjoy this week?

3) Reduce and 4) recycle, reuse, repair

3) Consume less (Reduce) and Share more: Our economy, based as it is on unbridled growth and production, is driving us to destroy the very life-systems of Earth upon which we are dependent for survival. Our "conspicuous consumption" and accumulation of stuff leads us to live over-worked, over-stressed, unhealthy lifestyles. Directly linked to our excesses is the devastating poverty and hunger of half of the people on our earth. (1 billion living on less than \$1 a day, another 2 billion living on less than \$2 dollars a day!!!).

For a great magazine article for Scripture study to support your action to consume less and share more: "Pay Attention to the Birds: A Bible Study on Luke 12, ecology, and economics" by Ched Myers In *Sojourners* magazine, December 2009. Go to <http://sojo.net/> and search for the Dec 2009 issue.

3A) Consume Less:

1) a) individuals: Use the handy tips for beating "Affluenza":

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/treat/tips.html> . ***Name one item you are planning to purchase soon and then answer the questions from Affluenza Tip #1***

b) families: For one of your family nights, gather around the computer and watch and discuss: "The Story of Stuff with Annie Leonard" is an engaging short film that explains the "materials economy" in 20 fun-filled minutes. <https://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/> Their project includes several other short animated films on specific aspects to empower our transition to a life-sustaining society.

2) When you do decide to make a purchase, look for **Fair Trade and green products and donations as gifts.**

a) <http://www.greenpages.org/> : “Green America's directory of Products and Services for People and the Planet”. Also, many local communities are beginning to offer “shop local” campaigns to support local businesses that are committed to practices that support the common good.

b) <http://www.serrv.org/> **Fair Trade** (chocolate, tea, coffee, gifts, clothing). Consider an **alternative gift** from <https://www.alternativegifts.org/> : “A nontraditional way of giving. Rather than buying yet one more necktie for Uncle George, honor him instead by giving in his name a life-sustaining gift to help abolish global poverty or to renew our planet's environment.”

3B) For services, consider Time Banking. “Tampa Bay Time is a community skills exchange, also known as a “time bank.” Time banking is a way to exchange services as an alternative to the cash economy.” <http://tampabaytime.org/>

3C) Share more: If you don't already have groups whose work you believe in and with whom you regularly share, check out Charity Navigator. Don't let that old excuse “but how do we know the money is used wisely?” stop you from sharing your excess with those who don't have enough to feed their kids today!!! <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm> My favorite group is www.BeyondBorders.net, with whom Walt and I and others from our parish visited in Haiti in 1999. “*Beyond Borders helps people build movements to liberate themselves from oppression and isolation. In Haiti and the United States, we are bringing people together for just and lasting change.*” Check them out via Charity Navigator site and notice they continue to receive the highest rating possible.

4) Recycle, Reuse and Repair: (remember “There is no **away**, when we throw away.”)

a) Recycling: Pinellas county A to Z Guide:

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/solidwaste/wheredoesitgo/default.htm> If you live outside Pinellas county, check with your local government.

As part of recycling, **close the loop** by purchasing products made with recycled materials, for example copy paper made from recycled paper.

b) Reuse: Ask your grandparents for ideas. Also, see <http://www.freecycle.org/> through which you, your business or group can give away your excess goods to others who can use them and/or you can make a request for wanted items.

c) Repair: while built-in obsolescence has made this more difficult, take a moment with a broken/torn item to consider if it might be repaired.

What items did you see your elder family members reusing which you now throw away?

What do you regularly throw in the trash which you will now look for ways to recycle/reuse/repair? (e.g. Ziploc bags wash and reuse!)

5) Food choices:

a) One area for action which recurs in nearly every resource I have studied involves the impact of our food choices. **The first recommended action here is to step-by-step move toward a plant-based diet, away from animal products marketed by the industrial food system.**

The **Vegetarian Resource Group** (<http://www.vrg.org>) offers lots of **guidance from Registered Dieticians** and some **great recipes** and easy ways to begin to switch your diet away from animal products. For articles about the connection between diet choices and climate change: <https://www.vrg.org/links/EnvironmentalInformation.htm>).

For a guide to sustainable food choices: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/for-earth-day-eat-as-if-the-planet-mattered-20180422>

b) Another recurring recommendation in many of the sources I have been studying is to buy organic whenever possible, looking for **locally grown organic foods**. Some sources are Community-supported Agriculture, <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/> and farmer's markets.

c) Start growing some of your own food. Cooperative Extension Service gardening classes are a good place to start <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/> , with offices all over Florida. (other states have their own). They offer resources for other aspects of sustainable living, also.

In St. Petersburg, FL: <https://www.theurbanharvest.com/> Online videos and workshops to help people learn how to sustainably grow veggies in Florida.

6) Transportation:

6a) **Drive less; walk/bike/bus and carpool more.** Plan errands so that you drive the fewest miles possible. Give up pleasure rides and take pleasure walks instead! Have **regular maintenance** done (e.g. air filter checks, check tire pressure monthly, etc.) so that your vehicle burns the least fossil-fuels possible. When you are choosing a replacement vehicle, purchase a hybrid or a plug-in electric.

6b) **If you travel by air**, weigh the impact on energy and climate against your reasons for this travel method. If you choose air, then commit to using step c).

6c) **Purchase carbon offsets for your fossil fuel emissions** generated by travel and other energy usage. Before I made the commitment to avoid air travel several years ago, the option we used is NativeEnergy. <https://nativeenergy.com/our-approach/carbon-offsets/>

7) Household and work-place energy use: As you read through 7& 8 lists circle those which you are willing to pursue over the next several months:

7a) Check with your electricity provider for energy efficiency action steps. For Duke/Progress Energy: <https://www.duke-energy.com/home/savings>

7b) Here is a sample of some of the changes we have made:

- Choose clothing which will keep you cool in summer, warm in winter. **Limit as much as possible the use of air conditioning and heating**, practicing accepting some discomfort as an act of love for the next generations.
- Change all **light bulbs** to compact fluorescent or LED; over the long-range they save money as well as energy/emissions. Save the old incandescent bulbs for use in little-used locations like closets (rather than throwing out!) Turn off all lights that are not really needed.
- **Unplug electronics when you are not using them;** one easy way is to hook up all computer-related items to one power strip, then turn off the power strip when you are not using the computer. And hook up all entertainment items to one power strip, turn it off when not using any of those items. Even when electronic devices are turned off, they use energy because of their "instantly-ready" systems. **Perhaps we can even cut way back on use of these devices, especially TV, and make careful decisions about when to purchase and use other electronics.**
- Line dry your clothes and air dry your dishes whenever possible. Clothes dryers and dishwashers take lots of fossil fuel energy (one load of either takes about 7 times the energy of one full load of cold water laundry wash, per Progress Energy calculator!)
- Choose the smallest, most efficient refrigerator you can find and keep the fridge

and freezer sections full (it actually takes less energy to keep it cold if it is full).

- Cover windows when they get full sun in the hot months. We inserted styrofoam panels with foil lining behind our window shades. This also offers insulation in cold months when inserted in the evening.

7 c) Invest in Renewable Energy: If you own a home, research solar energy. For a smaller starting step, commit a few extra dollars over your usual monthly electric bill for an **easy way to help fund renewable energy projects**. See

<https://www.arcadiapower.com/> . I set up payment of my electric bill through Arcadia Power so that it is paid automatically. Also, see Step 9 (below)

8) Energy and Water-saving steps and products:

8a) Choose native plants (green lawns are not native to Florida or many places on our planet!), use rain barrels for irrigation, stop using water and energy resources on sprinkler systems, stop using toxic pesticides and fossil-fuel based fertilizers, stop using fossil-fuel guzzling edgers and leaf blowers, replace areas which need mowing with mulch and food plants or natives as landscaping.

8b) Take very short showers, turn water off while sudsing, and use a low-flow shower head to save on water and water heating. Install a low-volume toilet to save lots of water; this saves energy used in water pumping and sewer treatment systems, as well as saving the increasingly scarce resource of drinkable water!

8c) Use plant-based cleaning products (did you know that most laundry and dish detergents are fossil-fuel based?) which save fossil-fuels and are non-toxic or less toxic than the usual brands.

9) Socially responsible and impact investing: If you have savings, especially savings for retirement which may be some years off, do you know what companies you are investing in? Have you looked at their impact on the environment? Are they polluting, using and /or extracting fossil-fuels like there is no end, investing in things like tobacco and weapons? Or are they investing in alternative energies development, affordable housing, education, community, health care, and environmental protection? **One easy change is to move your local banking from banks to credit unions.**

In addition to investing in renewable energies, I am deeply committed to community investing, especially where it offers empowerment to the poorest of the poor. I have invested my

retirement funds so that they are useful to my sisters and brothers living in poverty now (through investing in affordable housing, job creation, micro-credit, small business loans, etc.).

If you are interested in exploring this option for your retirement money, or any other socially responsible investing, I recommend the investment advisors I work with, advisors in the Natural Investments network: <http://naturalinvesting.com/> .

10) Join with others: This is an essential step!! Our personal changes are essential. Yet, without community, city, state, national, corporate, and global changes we will not make an adequate impact.

10a) Join with others to create local communities of mutual support. Many of the resources I have studied related to the crises we face suggest that one of the blessings that we may be able to receive as a result of having to navigate perilous times is a renewal of our local communities. Family groups, faith communities (especially smaller circles within large congregations), neighborhoods, co-ops, community gardens, congregational Green Teams, Nonviolent Communication practice groups, etc. Communities who work together to address our basic life-support needs (food, shelter, etc), and social and spiritual needs. It will become crystal clear that our individualistic, narcissistic, "me-first", consuming, frenetically busy culture actually works against our survival.

Consider engaging in the practice of Nonviolent (Compassionate) Communication with your family, friends, work groups, ministry groups, activist groups. For a video introduction on YouTube : Nonviolent Communication - San Francisco Lecture Workshop - Marshall Rosenberg *Synced sound* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH1MKAdxUpQ&t=1s>.

FMI <https://www.cnvc.org/learn-nvc/what-is-nvc> and <http://www.compassioncourse.org/> or <https://www.compassioncourse.org/thecompassionbook>

Consider taking the Ecological Footprint Quiz with your family, friends, and various circles: <https://www.footprintcalculator.org/> “This quiz estimates the size of your ecological footprint.” and offers more resources to learn more about the realities which we are facing and ways you can be part of the shift to a life-sustaining society.

Look at your own circles of influence and invite your friends, family, faith community, work and social circles to study these concerns with you, and to begin to envision together how we all might live, work, pray and play together in ways which might help to

create a viable future for the next generations.

10b) Join with others to take action to influence government and corporations to make the urgent changes needed. Pick a few groups which seem to be compatible with your views, research them, and then choose one or two to join. Join the action-alert networks of those groups and make the calls, send the emails/letters, go to the gatherings they organize. **Some options include:**

To join with others in a religious response: <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>
Interfaith Power & Light is mobilizing a religious response to global warming. Our mission is to inspire and mobilize people of faith and conscience to take bold and just action on climate change.

Specifically for Catholics: In the U.S.: Catholic Climate Covenant: Care for Creation, Care for the Poor <http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/> Catholic Climate Covenant helps US Catholics respond to the Church's call to care for creation and care for the poor. **Global:** <https://laudatosimovement.org/> *“To inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice.”*

To join with a wide global community taking action: <https://350.org/about/> We're an international movement of ordinary people working to end the age of fossil fuels and build a world of community-led renewable energy for all.