

Living simply to simply live, and let others live

Rich Heffern | Apr. 4, 2011 Eco Catholic

Can we lead our lives in ways that are satisfying and richly fulfilling while also just and environmentally benign, so that everyone in our community and in the world can live in similar ways without damaging the Earth? This question is fast becoming a central one.

What is enough? Over the last few decades, finding a satisfactory answer to this query has suddenly taken on an immense urgency. Besides the distressing mega-threats to our environment, widespread poverty and hunger plague the world's human population. We in the United States are five percent of the world's population yet use 40 percent of the world's resources.

We can blame advertisers or multinational corporations or government or politicians for heedless injustice and for the run-amok destruction of our beautiful planet in the name of having more consumer goods on display at the local mall. But who buys and uses these products? Who is responsible? Where does the buck stop?

If we all do 50 simple things to save the planet, will it be enough? Can we restore generosity to our human economy and curb its ravenous appetite for resources? How can we turn things around and give back to our world its lost heart and soul? How can we achieve security and sufficiency in our lives, stopping short of inequity, waste and clutter?

Many have found that one good means to these ends is to live in much simpler ways ? a personal response to the need for a more just and equitable world. Simple living is about daily choices, strategies, prioritizing and making wider decisions in an attempt to live moderately and to flourish without a lot of money. It is to live dependent largely upon unmarketable pleasures and satisfactions, with full hearts and without a lot of stuff in our storage sheds.

An active, energetic commitment to simple living will have varying degrees of influence on our everyday choices and on the larger decisions of life, depending on the level of seriousness with which we follow that commitment and upon the fluid, ever-changing situations and responsibilities in which we find ourselves involved. There is a wide spectrum of behavior that might fall under the heading of "simple living." There is an even wider variety of reasons people make these choices and attempt these disciplines in their living.

There are millions now who make some deliberate and energetic effort to live simply.

- Myra and John live in the suburbs of Chicago. They put plastic bins in their garage for recyclables. Both choose to ride public transit to their jobs every weekday. When they recently bought a new car, they opted for one without air conditioning or other added features. The whole family attempts to eat bit lower on the food chain than is widely done, limiting their consumption of meat. They also limit the amount of time they spend watching television, choosing to read and talk with their children most evenings.

- In rural New Mexico, Cyril and Ed card the wool and spin yarn from a dozen sheep they raise in their four-acre backyard. They also keep goats for milk and make their own cheese when they have time. Both are self employed Web site designers and work out of their home, a sprawling adobe structure they built themselves. When they must travel to faraway cities for conferences, they take the train rather than fly or drive.
- Marie is a retired accountant who lives in Kansas City. She lives alone in an elegant apartment for which she pays a modest rent. Marie spends a good deal of her spare time exploring her own inner life, through journaling, keeping track of her dreams, spiritual reading, and long talks and walks with her friends. What's left of her time is spent in vigorous volunteer work, helping maintain a women's spirituality center and a local farmer networking group by offering free bookkeeping services.
- In southeastern Colorado, Eleanor and Robert alternate between living a year or two in their small town community with a year or two in ministry. Eleanor works as an administrator in a small college, while Robert serves as minister in a Mennonite church. A year ago they finished a two-year stint as teachers in the Navajo lands in northern Arizona. They buy all their clothes in thrift shops. Robert bicycles every day to his church office.
- Vickie deliberately chooses not to have an income level high enough to require her to pay federal taxes, because so much goes to pay for war ? past, present and future. She earns some money painting houses and doing substitute teaching. She spends time working as a community organizer and refurbishing a three-story house in the inner city.
- Beth and Mary subsist almost entirely on organically grown vegetables, poultry and cheese, which they purchase in bulk quantities from a local food-buying club. They live in a roomy dome-shaped house standing on bottomland Mary inherited 20 years ago in the Missouri Ozarks. They make their living weaving rope sandals and hammocks and selling them at craft fairs. Both also play handmade musical instruments in a local bluegrass band.

Generosity and responsibility have taken root in these people's lives. It's a grown-up kind of spirituality. Their lifestyle choices describe practical solutions to a spiritual problem. They haven't chosen poverty, but to cultivate a rich inner and outer life, doing justice in the process.

Good resources for simple living can be found on the Web site of the Alternatives for Simple Living organization, a non-profit group that offers to "equip people of faith to challenge consumerism and to celebrate responsibly." Their [archives](#) [1] can be found online. There are excellent links there to other resources and affinity groups.

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Links:

[1] <http://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=archives.php>