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World Environment Day theme asks you to 'reduce your foodprint'

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[**Editor's note**: *This story has been updated with Pope Francis' reflections on World Environment Day.*]

From Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia to Portland, Ore., people across the world Wednesday are drawing attention to the annual loss of more than a billion tons of food from wasteful consumption.

The events are part of the United Nations? World Environment Day [1], whose theme this year is ?Think.Eat.Save. Reduce Your Foodprint,? borrowing a line from another consumption-cutting campaign [2].

The U.N.?s Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that worldwide, people waste 1.3 billion tons of food annually, or a third of global food production. At the same time, one in seven people globally go to bed hungry.

The ?Think.Eat.Save.? campaign encourages people to make responsible food decisions by adopting many of the practices already common to the ?green movement?: buying local, naturally grown foods; composting rather than trashing food scraps; and carrying groceries in reusable bags. Other tips suggest [1] limiting your spending to what you need, and finding creative recipes to combine leftovers in your fridge into a new meal.

Addressing food waste complements the Zero Hunger Challenge, an initiative of U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and a product of last year?s Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development.

?When food goes uneaten and is spoiled, everything that went into its production is lost ? from a farmer?s time and effort, to the fuel used to transport it to market, and the land and water used to grow it. Besides being an affront to the hungry, food waste is a drain on natural resources and damaging to the environment,? Ki-moon said in a message [3] on the ?Think.Eat.Save? campaign.

At his general audience Wednesday, Pope Francis addressed World Environment Day and the "culture of waste" [4] that has led to a diminished value placed not only on human life (both alive and unborn), but also on food and the earth's resources.

"Consumerism has led us to become used to an excess and daily waste of food, to which, at times, we are no longer able to give a just value, which goes well beyond mere economic parameters. We should all remember, however, that throwing food away is like stealing from the tables of the the poor, the hungry! I encourage everyone to reflect on the problem of thrown away and wasted food to identify ways and means that, by seriously addressing this issue, are a vehicle of solidarity and sharing with the needy," he said.

Francis used the Gospel story of Jesus and the multiplication of the loaves and fish as an example of responsible global consumption: "Jesus asks his disciples not to throw anything away: no waste! There is this fact of twelve baskets: Why twelve? What does this mean? Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, which symbolically represent all people. And this tells us that when food is shared in a fair way, with solidarity, when no one is deprived, every community can meet the needs of the poorest. Human ecology and environmental ecology walk together."

The host for this year?s World Environment Day ? first established in 1972 ? is Mongolia, a country not known for food waste, but rather one whose nomadic traditions offer examples of food preservation [5] to the present-day food waste problem.

Events in the northern Asian country so far have included a marathon and a Children?s Day celebration. It has also held a conference on green development, which produced a U.N. report [6] advocating smallholder farmers as key players in the global movement toward sustainable agriculture and ending hunger.

In the U.S., World Environment Day?s center is Portland in the Northwest. The day's events include [7] a city council proclamation, a children?s painting competition and several discussions, as well as various rallies and processions.

From the Catholic sphere, the Augustinians of the Midwest are one group encouraging their orders and communities to mark World Environment Day through prayer.

?There?s a mandate to feed the hungry. And we see this in the Gospel,? said Br. Thomas Taylor, the province secretary of the Midwest Augustinians.

Through their website, they have made available several Augustinian prayer service models [8] for its orders and other interested groups.

In addition to World Environment Day, the Augustinians have set aside six other U.N. awareness days for educational and action observance, including the International Day of Families (May 15); the International Day of Peace (Sept. 21) and Human Rights Day (Dec. 10).

?Part of the mandate of being a Christian is to be concerned and caring about the welfare of other people,? Taylor said.

He told *NCR* that the ?Think.Eat.Save? theme ties in with a previous campaign against hunger the order held in recent years.

In that campaign, Taylor said the order produced educational materials aimed at identifying the root causes of hunger: ?Is it because there?s not enough production of food, or is it because food is distributed inequitably? Or is it because food is sometimes used as a weapon by various political factions to reward their friends and punish their enemies??

Those questions, Taylor said, lead to two approaches to addressing hunger: ?the charity approach, where you make food available to people that are hungry? through food kitchens and food pantries, and ?what we call the justice approach, where you try to work and see what some of the causes of hunger are, and trying to push for or promote a better solution.?

To the latter?s end, the campaign encouraged people to write letters to their elected officials, not in support of particular legislation, but asking them to be mindful of the needs of the hungry, both locally and globally.

No matter the approach, though, both connect back to the same goal.

?What we?re trying to do is to raise awareness that there are certain issues that are part of being a Catholic, part of being a Christian that we?re called to address and become of aware of as something more than just world problems, but rather these are Christian moral issues that face all of us as Christians,? Taylor said.

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[1] http://www.unep.org/wed/A-Z/
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