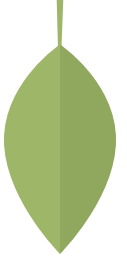




Simple Living Leads to Spiritual Growth

A Catholic Volunteer Network Archives Resource

*"Our Lord needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts.
Neither intelligence nor talents. He cherishes simplicity".
-Saint Therese of Lisieux*



What is Simple Living / Simplicity?

Simple life is chosen, not imposed.

Voluntary simplicity is "a deliberate organization of life for a purpose."

The simple lifestyle involves simplifying, reducing and streamlining.

Simplicity means focusing on life-affirming values, such as time with family, rather than accumulating things. Fewer concerns about things allow people to have more energy to be good neighbors and community members. For example, community involvement takes time getting to know the issues. If everyone is totally involved in making money, there is no time left to "hang on to democracy."

Simplicity also calls for practicing a healthy self-reliance, such as growing some of one's own food. Simple living means cultivating a connection with others and with nature. And it means living with mindfulness, so that one becomes more aware of the inner world and more attentive to the moment.

Voluntary simplicity means practicing non-violence. We normally don't think of going to a shopping mall as an act of violence, but for everything we consume some form of crushing or killing is involved. We do need to consume to live, Burch said, but the more one consumes, the more violence takes place. Living simply means less violence.

Finally, simple living means choosing a higher quality of life. Our consumer society has directly affected the quality of our water and air, and work is more hazardous. Instead, we should make choices in favor of wholesome food, and keep in mind that a clean brook has value too.

Simple living is conducive to spiritual growth, Burch said. Aiming for a slower pace of life allows more room for the holy. Voluntary simplicity is not poverty, destitution, or deprivation, because poverty does not involve choice. A chosen simplicity of life is at the heart of every major religion in the world, Burch told an earlier gathering of Benedictines, Benedictine oblates, and members of other religious communities in the area. The Rule of Benedict can be read as a metaphor for the relationships in the world. For example, the directive for monks to treat all the goods of the monastery as holy vessels is an invitation for all to treat things with care and respect.

Burch noted that one theme of the jubilee is restoring equity, moving us away from competition. A second theme calls for restoring the earth, giving it a rest and nurturing it. There has not been enough emphasis in the church on this second theme, he said.



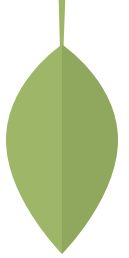


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“As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler; solitude will not be solitude, poverty will not be poverty, nor weakness weakness.”

- Henry David Thoreau



Communal Response to Live a Simpler Lifestyle

(Adapted from the Marianist Novitiate Community)

By the nature of our volunteer year, we are presented with an invitation to question the reasons and motives of our lifestyle so that it be simple, true, and valid after the example of. Modeling them means that our lifestyle choices are not complicated; without additions; not qualified; not showy or ornate; unpretentious, radical, pure, undressed, disentangled, from the norms of society.

We also strive to live a simple lifestyle because the goals of the program ask us to make a conscious resolution to do this. We choose to live simply as an act of faith performed for the sake of individual integrity and wholeness, and as an act of celebration and harvesting of the riches found in creation. Living simply, we strive to enhance the quality of our lives by emphasizing the creative spirit/energy in each of us. We also choose to live simply as a practice of sharing the world's goods among all people.

The immense burden on the earth's capacity presents a challenge to use our resources in a sustainable manner, assisting nature to heal the marks of our activities of farming, manufacturing, sheltering, and transportation.

As good stewards we do not exploit our earth or its goods, but seek a sustainable future. Moved by faith and love for others, we seek a simpler life that allows the earth's regenerative processes to keep pace with our use of air, water, soil, and minerals. Our sparing is a symbol that can help form attitudes of reverence for God's gifts and concern for the others on the earth and for generations to come.

Our heritage deepens and supports these demands for living our community of goods in a simpler way and thereby helps achieve equitable use of resources. To these ends, we focus on the following areas:

- **Diet & Kitchen**
- **Energy Area**
- **Community Recreation**
- **Personal Possessions**
- **Community / House Maintenance**





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Communal Response to Live a Simpler Lifestyle (cont'd)

Diet & Kitchen

1. To speak to the dignity of work, the community will do its own cooking. Members of the community share the task of cooking meals.
2. To prevent an ever increasing escalation of needs, we will agree on a set amount of soft drinks, beer, and ice cream and other foods purchased each week.
3. As a means of expressing our union with the poor, we will: a) have at least one meat-less meal each week; b) have a simple meal each week (eg. soup and sandwiches); c) eliminate the following junk foods except on special occasions: potato chips, pretzels, fritos, purchased cookies, and other similar purchased foods; d) have desserts only on special occasions; e) have occasional "baking days" to prepare food for the poor; t) limit our communitarian use of liquor to special occasions; g) support food boycotts

Energy Area

1. We will try to pool car trips when possible and avoid unnecessary food/shopping trips during the week (make do with what is in the house).
2. We save newspapers, plastics, metals, and glass for recycling.
3. We monitor our use of electricity (turn off unnecessary lights, appliances, etc.).
4. During cold weather, the heat in the house is kept at a temperature which is healthy but as low as possible to conserve energy. During the summer we use fans sparingly.

Community Recreation

We attempt to schedule community recreation days/ evenings to provide community with simple and inexpensive ways of recreating together.

Personal Possessions

1. We attempt to use things until they wear out - repair of items is preferred to purchase of new items.
2. We periodically go through our personal belongings and evaluate our possessions. What we have not used and what we do not need is given to others, especially the poor who might be able to use it.

Community / House Maintenance

The community does its own maintenance (both mechanical and janitorial) and renovations from its personal resources. We use things until they wear out or would cost more to repair than to purchase brand new. We only call outside help when the proper skills are not found in the community itself.





Simple Living Leads to Spiritual Growth

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Thoughts on Simple Life

By a former volunteer/missioner - September 27, 1995

What fears do I have about the simple life of the community?

Simple life can mean many different things to different people - coming to some notion of consensus can be challenging (this can also be exciting) but my fear is getting bogged down in the "challenge". I'll also be honest that a fear I would have would be my ability to be non-critical of the final definition decided upon by the community; especially if it is very different from my own! How would we readjust that lived notion of simplicity once people leave or join us? Will our definition be a "standing definition" that doesn't change or will it be organic, growing and changing with the people involved?

Another fear I have is not being able to live up to the challenge of living simply - i.e. my having to give up certain creature comforts (that would probably be wise for me to lighten up on) but which I enjoy. Sometimes "simplicity" is hard work and sometimes I just don't care or I don't have the energy to do that work.

Living responsibly is an integrity issue - I worry that if I delve too deep into it I'll find that my integrity" has been pretty minimal. Living responsibly can also get overwhelming.

Then it gets down to some of the nitty gritty questions: What does "sharing things in common" mean? How are broken things repaired? Would households have their own definitions; while the overall group meets certain standards? Will simplicity involve a sharing a funds? What kind of financial commitment might this mean?

What excites me about the simple life of the community?

Working through any of the things I stated above are also what excites me about the notion of simple communal life. The challenge.

Probably the most important aspect for me would be the notion of support - sometimes challenging, sometimes gentle - the knowledge that we are all trying this together. Some members may be better at certain. aspects of simplicity than at other aspects, but the sum is greater than the separate parts.

Probably the basic struggle for me is within: the part that is attracted to setting up a safe, secure "nice" life for myself, with some nice things and nice space; vs the part that wants to live a life of more integrity, responsibility in the world, using only what I need, heeding the ramifications of my decisions, sharing resources.





Simple Living Leads to Spiritual Growth

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Do You Really Need That?

The biggest incentive for living a simpler lifestyle is...

Live simply so others may simply live"; **"to contribute to the equality of people by not using more than one's fair share of the earth's resources"**; "Because of the poor"; **Simplifying gives life meaning and value; simplifying makes one feel less rushed; and simplifying allows one to live as Jesus lived**; becoming less "thing"-centered frees people to focus on relationships; **Learning to put others first; learning to prioritize - learning to become less selfish**; helping the environment; **contributing to your own health by gaining a longer and better life.**

The most difficult part about living a simpler lifestyle is...

Living a simple lifestyle would be a piece of cake if it weren't for the people you had to deal with! The hardest part about slowing down is having to convince all the Nintendo-hooked, Gap-crazy, cellular-phone-toting fast trackers who are your family and friends. Simple living "goes against the grain" of the wider culture of consumerism. It feels weird when you have to keep explaining counter-cultural tendencies to friends and co-workers - some of which end up placing a harsh judgment on your decisions or represent a tempting kind of materialistic peer pressure.

Other obstacles: It's very tempting at the end of an exhausting work day to want to order a pizza and not rally to fix dinner; wanting a nice home; figuring out what's simple and what's excessive; realizing (with mounting frustration) that the more earth-friendly products and services cost more; "feeling the pinch of doing without"

What 's worked best in trying to live a simple, balanced life...

Throw away catalogs before they make it into the house; budget time according to your values; **asking "do I really need that?"**; deciding to have only one - one car, one tv, one phone - when you could have more; **hang out with like-minded folks**; less TV; **no TV**; give away excess belongings; **talk about what to buy and why**; take your time; **live according to a budget and don't spend beyond your means**; make donations to charity a regular budget item; **cut up your credit cards**; learn about the poor; **have regular contact with the poor**; pray; **plant a garden**; use the public library; **take time out to be alone**; eat light; **help others**; ask for God's help; **keep a global perspective on your standard of living and be disciplined about prayer and reading**; take time for prayer, meditation, and friends; **be open to God's presence and guidance in life**; grow strong in faith - let God worry; **keep similar company**; don't hang out with people who golf, play tennis, and decorate their houses; **discern wants and needs**; walk instead of taking the car; **realize the power of ads**; be patient.

Some things that could be done without... **Clothes (latest fashions, clothes and shows for all seasons)**; Luxury foods (eating out alot, alot of red meat, junk foods); **Television (two or more TV sets, having any TV set, excessive television viewing, cable)**; Cars (more than one car, a new car, fancy cars); **microwave**; dry cleaning; **Disney World**; movies; **dogs**; fancy home; **turning up the thermostat in winter**; yearly vacations; **camcorder**; fancy parties; **latest computers**; CD player; **vacation home**; car phone; **gas grill**; high-status jobs; **extra activities**; furniture.

The things that may be difficult to cut back... **TV**; junk food; **good food**; eating out; **clothes/shoes**; cars; **books/magazines**; gifts to friends/relatives; **furniture**; travel; **tickets to sporting events/theater**; labor-saving devices; **music**; work.

The most misunderstood aspect of simple living is... **That doing without means you will be unhappy**; there's actually a great amount of freedom that comes with cutting back; **it's not a "hippie" or "new-age thing"**; poverty is a virtue; **it's too hard to do**; it means giving up all of modern life or everything you like; **it's only about spending less money**; it's boring; **cutting down on social activities makes you appear to be selfish with your time and friends.**

These were responses to a survey conducted by Salt magazine and were printed in the September 1994 issue in the form of an article.
Claretian Publications





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Reflection Questions on Simple Life

- Describe your family's economic background when you were young.
- How do you characterize yourself today?
- How has your economic status helped or hindered you?
- What experiences have you had with people living in poverty?
- When and why might you be tempted to buy more, work more, or do more?
- The biggest incentive for living a simpler lifestyle is...
- The most difficult part about living a simpler lifestyle would be...
- Some things that could be done without are...
- The things that may be difficult to cut back are...



Reflection Questions on Justice and the Kingdom of God

- When in your life have you taken a stand you believed in?
- What do you do when your stance leads you away from what everyone else is doing in society? Or from an official Church stance? How do you see your role as a member of the church in confronting real "life issues"?
- When you hear of God's Kingdom, what does that mean to you?
- When you hear of the Church, what does that mean to you?
- What does the American Dream mean to you? What does it say about the purpose of life, success, and our needs?
- As you understand it, what does the Kingdom of God say about the purpose of life, success, and our needs? To what extent is your view of the American Dream the same as, or different from, what the Kingdom of God means to you?



Personal Response

- In your own life has there been any hurt or handicap which has led you to experience God's special love for you?
- How do these hurts open your eyes to the community and world around you?
- What is easier for you: to minister to others, or to be ministered to? How do you feel when you are in need?
- How do you feel when you know someone needs you? What do you do?
- Having considered your stance on the struggle to further the Kingdom, What changes or adjustments do you want to make in your future practice?
- As I see it now, the Kingdom comes when...





Simple Living Leads to Spiritual Growth

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Simplicity Prayer

Prayer of Simplicity

Dear God,

We give thanks for places of simplicity and peace.

Let us find such a place within ourselves.

We give thanks for places of refuge and beauty.

Let us find such a place within ourselves.

We give thanks for places of nature's truth and freedom, of joy, inspiration, and renewal, places where all creatures may find acceptance and belonging. Let us search for these places in the world, in ourselves, and in others.

Let us restore them. Let us strengthen and protect them, and let us create them. May we mend this outer world according to the truth of our inner life and may our souls be shaped and nourished by nature's eternal wisdom.

Amen



Self-Care Reflection, Checklist and Prayer



Simple Living Links

Jesuit Volunteers Simple Living Resource:

http://www.jesuitvolunteers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Simple_Living.pdf

The Simple Living Toolkit: <http://simplelivingtoolkit.com/free-resources/>

The Simple Living Toolkit's purpose is to help you simplify your life for more joy. Decluttering your home and life helps create space for the things that really matter, the things that bring us happiness and meaning - like relationships and the pursuits that fulfill us.

Center for a New American Dream: www.newdream.org

The Center for a New American Dream is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to reducing resource consumption and improving the quality of life in North America. Their mission is to help individuals, communities, and private businesses foster new consumption patterns and sustainable practices which will ensure a healthy planet for future generations.

Context Institute: www.context.org

Context Institute explores how human-society can become sustainable (i.e. able to meet the needs of the present without diminishing the prospects for the future), and serves as a catalyst for voluntary change toward a more humane and sustainable culture. They are one of a handful of organizations that have focused on sustainability as a central theme for more than a decade, and are now internationally recognized as an authority in this area.

National Religious Partnership for the Environment: www.nrpe.org

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment is a federation of major American faith communities: the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. The Partnership's home page includes a description of NRPE's history, mission, and member groups, with links to constituent faith communities. With a commitment "to be ourselves, together," each of our faith groups is implementing distinctive programs on behalf of a common mission: We act in faith to cherish and protect God's creation. Our goal is to integrate commitment to global sustainability and environmental justice permanently into all aspects of religious life. (from NRPE site)



Self-Care Reflection, Checklist and Prayer



Simple Living Links (cont'd)

Simple Living: www.simpleliving.org

Simple Living is:

- freedom from stuff and over-consumption.
- living intentionally and with integrity.
- caring for the Earth and Earth's inhabitants.
- an act of faith and a spiritual discipline.
- living ethically.
- a political act and an economic revolution.
- time tested and patriotic in the spirit of Thoreau.
- anti-empire and pro-community.
- our future as a species and a planet.

Simple Living promotes peace and challenges the rationale for wars. I will share resources, book reviews, ideas and practical suggestions on faithful simple living.

Laudato Si: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si') is the new appeal from Pope Francis addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. Pope Francis calls the Church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of our environmental challenges and to join him in embarking on a new path. This encyclical is written with both hope and resolve, looking to our common future with candor and humility.

Global Catholic Climate Movement: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>

Founded in January 2015, we are a coalition of 400+ Catholic member organizations in all continents with a constituency of nearly 1 million Catholic individuals, guided by an international Steering Committee and a secretariat based in Boston. Our diverse membership reflects the diversity of our Catholic family: Caritas agencies, religious orders, lay movements, youth groups, diocesan offices and Catholic-inspired NGOs are members of GCCM.