



London Diocesan Council
Of
The Catholic Women's League of Canada

One Heart, One Voice, One Mission

To: All Parish Presidents, Regional Chairperson, and Community Life Chairpersons

Cc: London Diocesan Council

From: Kathy Levesque, London Diocesan Chairpersons, Community Life

Date: January 23, 2016

Directive # 14

Living with Limits, Living Well! Session 6

Canada – an energy superpower! Dream or nightmare?

Energy is intimately related to economic growth and to the kinds of technology people are able to use in the “energy regime” in which they live. At any given time, the shape or source of energy determines what humans can or cannot achieve in terms of production and production-related technology. Throughout history, **when a new “energy regime” replaces an older one, dramatic social changes happen.**

In early history, when human muscle was still the major available source of energy, slavery was massively important. To make more economic gain, more slaves were used. Throughout history, slaves were used to serve their masters to make more profits.

When new forms of mechanization made it easier for the young United States of America to see that it could thrive economically without clinging to the evil of slavery. During the First Industrial Revolution – entrepreneurs in the 18th century learned how to harness the energy of steam, fired by coal or wood, steam powered engines promptly revolutionized transportation and manufacturing. Then came electricity; and soon afterwards, oil and gas became indispensable for our land, water and air transportation as well as for lighting and heating. We moved into high gear.

Andrew Nikiforuk states that in a way, we still behave like slaveholders in the way we use energy: “Oil servitude is so prevalent that it is no more visible to us than the abuses of human slaves were to roman slaveholders” How do things as energy and technology come to be questions of conscience for people of faith?

The questions for even the peaceful uses of nuclear power pose an issue of conscience for many of us. Even the burning questions around our massive dependence on oil, now that we know about greenhouse gases and climate change are even more serious.

When our conscience is troubled, we need to seek the guidance of God on personal morality. This can be done in honest scientific research; in the lessons learned from human experience both recent and historic; and in prayerful return to the sources from which the Christian community hopes to draw inspired teaching – including the sacred Scripture.

The deadly consequence of today's ‘energy regime’ - Oil has come to dominate economies and lifestyles. It is not just the modes of transportation that requires the oil, but oil-based products as diverse as plastics, construction materials and chemicals are also embedded in our daily lives. We depend on oil – for our toothbrush, the packaging of our cereal, the warmth of our house and how we get to work.

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The cry of voices is raised every day about the dangers built into the oil-based technology/economy that now dominates the world. Countries around the world are searching for oil. The increased demand has helped to push the price of oil five times higher than it was a decade ago. Higher prices demand and higher prices make it profitable for corporations to claw and dig even deeper for deposits that used to be uneconomical to develop. The costly, controversial, water hungry process of separating oil from sand will potentially add billions of barrels of oil from Canada and Venezuela to the global economy, and impact global environment. Our fossil-fuel based economy and its accompanying lifestyles are at a crossroads. Will we decide to leave in the ground, or under the sea, oil (and coal) whose extraction would threaten precious bodies of water or the air we breathe? There could be many dangers that can happen if we do not start to take seriously what is happening to the earth. Our intense use of fossil fuels brings with it an excess of the green house gases which destroy the ability Earth's atmosphere to protect us from the sun's heat.

The Complexity of reducing our 'carbon footprint' - Countries that arrived early to the industrial Revolution, have been heating and polluting the global atmosphere for many generations. In order to maintain and increase the booming cycle of production, transportation, trade and consumption, "rich" countries developed self-serving foreign investment and trade practices which badly hurt the traditional economies and cultures of nations which were not yet industrialized.

Out of this imbalance has emerged the concept of a massive "ecological debt" owed to poorer countries by countries that profited early from the oil-based industrial revolution. The global North benefited by its excessive use of fossil fuels. It should bear the major costs involved in cutting back and repairing environmental damage. The global South should not be held back because of problems caused by the global North. This inherited imbalance is a crucial obstacle to getting agreement on how to act in the face of Climate change.

We need to give much higher priority to research, innovation and implementation of alternative natural sources of energy – wind, sun, biomass and hydropower. Canada has these in abundance and the electricity they can produce could significantly reduce our deep dependence on oil.

We can be an energy superpower – but not by barreling along with fossil fuel production as if the problem of climate change, and other environmental warning signs facing our generation. We need to seek wisdom with all seriousness and need to change our priorities. It will take the best efforts of all of us – in scientific research, in economic planning, in political action, decision making, and in education of consciences. We need to pray for personal and collective wisdom that is the gift of God.

Share your insights: In a group, discuss question: As citizens of Canada, what should we do about the oil sands? Should we promote Canada as an "energy superpower?"

(Text taken from Living with limits, living well.) For a copy of this book,

www.cccbpublications.ca