

# Recycling and Re-using— Making a Difference

by John Dorner

Pop tabs on soft drink cans, used stamps, used eye-glasses and milk bags. Do we throw them into the garbage and add filth to the earth? Or do we follow the example of members of the Catholic Women's League (CWL) and give them value so that we show respect for God's creation while providing assistance to those in need? Recycling and re-using can make a difference!

Sandra Blais, who has served for several years as president of the CWL at Our Lady of the Visitation Parish in Ottawa near Greeley, has headed up the recycling and re-using program at her parish. She is pleased that CWL members from other parishes have supported the program by collecting pop tabs, stamps, eye-glasses and milk bags from their parishes and handing them over. Several local schools are also collecting the items and incorporating them into their environmental studies.

How are these items used? Pop Tabs are given to Clifford Bowey School, which serves children with moderate to severe developmental disabilities. The tabs have monetary value as they are an excellent source of high quality recycled aluminum. The tabs are sold by the pound, and funds raised allow for the purchase of mobility equipment for children with physical disabilities. An incredible amount of pop tabs have been dropped off at Our Lady of Visitation Parish from many contributors.

The CWL also collects used postage stamps and forwards them to the Redemptorists Mission Stamp Bourse in Windsor, Ontario. They in turn prepare and sell the stamps to companies, resulting in a return of about \$2000 every two to

three months. The funds are then turned over to Canadian Food for Children, a charitable organization started by Dr. Andrew Simone, a member of the Franciscan Secular Order. Run entirely by volunteers, this organization delivers food to people in 18 to 22 developing countries.

Eye-glasses are collected and sent to the Medical Ministry International Canada in Stoney Creek, Ontario. This Christian organization provides medical services to people in need in countries where there are few services. A high proportion of the world's visually impaired live in developing countries and therefore it is a gift for them to have access to eye-glasses.

Milk bags cannot be recycled, but they can be kept out of landfill by giving them to the CWL, who make them into sleeping mats - a major benefit for those living in developing countries. The plastic mats warm up in hot countries and become comfortable to sleep or sit on. The chemical in the printing deters harmful parasites that could otherwise invade the body of someone sleeping or sitting on the ground.

Several members of the CWL and other crafters in Ottawa have been actively involved in making mats. They use looms they make themselves, as weaving is faster than crocheting. This past summer arrangements were made to have 173 finished sleeping mats, 25 sitting mats, 12 totes and 121 pillows delivered to developing countries in the global south via the Canadian Food for Children Project. No shipping costs were incurred due to the generosity of volunteers and partner organizations.

There are many contributors who support the milk bag project as well as the other projects mentioned above, including churches, schools, nursing



Sandra Blais at Milk Bag Ministry Display Board following successful presentation. Photo: Christine St. Jean.

homes, day care centres, restaurants and businesses. CWL councils in the Ottawa Diocese have also been most generous in contributing.

One of our favourite stories took place in July, when Sandra Blais received an email alerting her that a printing error was made on 300,000 milk bags and that they were destined to go to landfill. At the last minute Sandra was able to grab 52,800 of the bags in 22 boxes. All were used to make the popular sleeping mats!

Anyone interested in helping out in the project is welcome to contact Sandra. She can be reached by telephone (613-443-1453) or by email (sandra.cwl.olv.rfp@gmail.com).

*John Dorner serves as volunteer coordinator of Creation Care Ministry with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa.*

## Web Watch Sustainability

by Steffan Hammonds

**Sustainability**  
<<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>>

The most widely quoted definition of sustainability as a part of the concept of sustainable development is that of the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations on March 20, 1987: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

**Environment and Climate Change Canada**

<<https://www.ec.gc.ca/dd-sd/>>

Sustainable development is about meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations. It is about improving the standard of living by protecting human health, conserving the environment, using resources efficiently and advancing long-term economic competitiveness.

**Center for Sustainability at Aquinas College**

<<http://www.centerforsustainability.org/resources.php?category=89&root=176>>

Measuring sustainability involves tracking indicators, or "bits of information which, added together, provide an overview of what is happening in a community and to a community" (Cape Cod Center for Sustainability). It enables goal setting, the determination of business value, and

further adoption of sustainable practices by businesses, organizations, government, and individuals.

**Sustainable Communities Online**

<<http://www.sustainable.org/about>>

The sustainability of a community depends on creating and maintaining its economic and environmental health, promoting social equity, and fostering broad-based citizen participation in planning and implementation.

**Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future**

<[http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme\\_cl/mod17.html](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_cl/mod17.html)>

The kind of change required by sustainability implicates each community, each household, each individual. Successful solutions will need to be rooted in the cultural specificity of the town or region if the people are to be supportive of and involved in such change.

**Sustainability Metrics**

<<http://www.vaughan.ca/city-hall/departments/dp/Pages/Sustainability-Metrics.aspx>>

The City of Vaughan, in collaboration with the City of Brampton and the Town of Richmond Hill, created sustainability metrics as a tool to achieve healthy, complete sustainable communities.

*Steffan Hammonds is a regular contributor to the PEN.*



Workshop leaders teaching how to weave the milk bags into sleeping mats. Left to right: Hazel Lada, Wendy Kool, Evangeline Downey, Freddie Walsh. Photo: Lillian Martineau.