



Briefing

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EDITOR

Recently scientists have discovered that a drug produced from the bark of the obscure Pacific yew is effective in treating ovarian, breast, and lung cancer. But the yew, which grows in ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest, has been largely wiped out by logging operations. The tree is only 1 of almost 4,000 threatened plant and animal species in the United States; it dramatically demonstrates that the loss of any of these could be a tragedy for humans. Our fate is intimately linked to that of the world in which we live.

Two eloquent thinkers on the significance of environmental issues and human survival write in this issue's special section. Rev. Thomas Berry, CP, argues that we must make profound changes in how all professions function to create a new relationship between humans and the natural world. Rev. William J. Wood, SJ, believes that healing also requires a change in our deeply ingrained worldview that humans are the masters of nature. We can start, he suggests, by committing ourselves—as individuals and as organizations—to doing no harm to the earth each day.

Many healthcare organizations have taken steps to preserve the environment. In researching his article on CHA members' efforts, assistant editor Phil Rheinecker found that individuals often play a key role in initiating programs in their facilities. He also notes that facilities are learning that the issues are complex, and the right solution is not always the expected one: "One hospital decided that it would be more environmentally effective to continue to use and recycle Styrofoam cups rather than change to paper or washable ones."

Jerry N. Uelsmann's photographs illustrate the section with images that fire the imagination. In photos that he describes as "obviously symbolic, but not symbolically obvious," Uelsmann helps us envision our world in new ways. Like all good art, these images stimulate creativity—creativity that will be needed as we seek ways to preserve a world in which the ecosystems of forests, wetlands, deserts, and prairies are disappearing.

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PLAN FOR HEALTHCARE REFORM

Sr. Bernice Coreil, DC, has chaired a task force that has been crafting the Catholic Health Association's plan for creating a more just and equitable system for delivering healthcare in the United States. Her article on p. 34 gives an overview of the reform plan. Sr. Coreil explains the task force's preeminent considerations in constructing the proposal: (1) that the healthcare system focus on meeting people's needs and (2) that it reflect the fundamental values found in Catholic social teaching.

An accompanying article (p. 37) explains the conditions that spurred CHA's reform initiative and the integrating elements the task force determined to be essential to a system that would provide a continuum of care to meet the broad range of people's healthcare needs.



Jerry N. Uelsmann