

# The Ministry and the Environment

Disposal of  
medical waste  
has become a  
significant  
environmental  
issue.

**G**erard Manley Hopkins, a great Victorian poet who also happened to be a Jesuit priest, once wrote a sonnet, called “God’s Grandeur,” about human misuse of the planet Earth. The poem describes a defeated, exhausted world, “seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil/And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell.”

Ironically, some of that “smudge” is today inflicted by health care organizations, particularly in the ways they dispose of hazardous medical waste. In this issue’s special section, “Environmental Responsibility and the Ministry,” *Health Progress* takes a look at the ecological damage done by health care—and also at the measures some Catholic organizations are taking to reduce that damage.

Our guest editor for the section is Sr. Mary Ellen Leciejewski, OP, coordinator of the Ecology Program at Dominican Hospital, Santa Cruz, CA. Sr. Mary Ellen has helped bring together articles on (among other topics) managing medical waste, nurses as natural environmental advocates, launching mercury-reduction projects, and the Catholic tradition vis-à-vis care of the natural world.

Hopkins’ sonnet has a comforting, nearly eschatological ending, incidentally. Just when all seems lost, morning, as Hopkins puts it, “springs”:

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

In the meantime, leaders of Catholic health care organizations want to do all they can to protect the environment. This issue’s special section offers some suggestions concerning how that can be done.

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